OFFICIAL BALLOT FOR THE GENERAL ELECTION

# THE Nation.

A B C D

# TO THE POLLS

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# Letters

## Obama Campaign Answers *The Nation*

Chicago
Thank you for your "Change *We* Can Believe In: Open Letter to Barack Obama," which appeared in the August 18/25 issue of *The Nation*. We appreciate hearing from so many supporters of Senator Obama, and we appreciate the opportunity to respond.

*The Nation* is right to say that it will take an unprecedented grassroots movement to change Washington. Each of you should take pride in the work you've done to build our campaign. Your advocacy of core Democratic and progressive values and your willingness to work for them in this election are absolutely essential to winning on November 4 and creating the change we need.

*The Nation* listed many of the priorities and ideals that bind us together, and Senator Obama takes great heart in the unprecedented level of unity we've achieved around the main tenets of our agenda for change. What unites us is so much greater than what divides us, and this will be a source of great strength as we work to win this election and tackle the great challenges facing our nation.

Near the close of your letter, you made a promise that embodies the highest ideal of citizenship—participation in our democracy. You wrote, "If you [Obama] win in November, we will work to support your stands when we agree with you and to challenge them when we don't." You know that participation in our democracy begins with voting, but it does not end there. You know that it includes being an educated and engaged voter, learning about the issues and the candidates, and fighting for what you believe in.

We will not always agree, but Senator Obama will always tell you where he stands and why. We appreciate the feedback you've given, and Senator Obama respects your positions and the conviction behind them. Your support on the many issues we agree on is crucial, and we are confident we will chart a new and better course for America together.
The Obama Campaign

letters@thenation.com

## Hey Buddy, Can Ya Spare a Few Billion?

Quincy, Mass.
Thank you for "Bailout Nation," your interesting, diverse coverage of the bailout plan [Oct. 13]. I have contacted my Congressman asking where to get the forms to request my own bailout. Unfortunately, I haven't heard back.
Greg Hillier

Somewhere in Cyberspace
Thank you for your bailout issue, especially William Greider's clear statement of what Henry Paulson's original proposal included. What was in it to prevent Paulson's and Bush's buddies from taking the $700 billion, divvying up the swag and riding off into the sunset with the mother of all golden parachutes? The original House version just increased the number of buddies in the deal. Does the current version have anything to prevent this—something that has teeth in it? I don't trust this bunch.
Shirley E. Hastings

Baltimore
I found myself looking at some old *Nation*s, including one from November 15, 1999. The lead editorial, "Breaking Glass-Steagall," had these prophetic words: "The misnamed Federal Services Modernization Act will usher in another round of record-breaking mergers, as companies rush to combine into 'one stop shopping' operations, concentrating financial power in trillion-dollar global giants and paving the way for future taxpayer bailouts of too-big-to-fail financial corporations." Fair to say… good call.
Lou Rosenblatt

Buffalo, N.Y.
I read your bailout issue straight through last night when I should have been sleeping. What kept me awake was your array of arguments against the bailout. I get the logic as a matter of social policy and agree with the specific suggestions. Except for the small equity in my condominium, my retirement assets are all invested in the

*(continued on page 22)*

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The Nation.
since 1865

# Democratic Vistas

"Did you too, O friend, suppose democracy was only for elections, for politics, and for a party name?" asked Walt Whitman in his essay "Democratic Vistas." Writing in the aftermath of the Civil War, the great poet hoped that democracy might become more than just the balance of ballots cast, that it might find its fullest expression in "the highest forms of interaction between men, and their beliefs… democracy in all public and private life." But Whitman also had reason to despair. As Reconstruction came to a close, American democracy failed even to fulfill its promise of enfranchisement for all freedmen, and within a few years this nation witnessed the stark injustices of Jim Crow and the first Gilded Age.

EDITORIAL

American democracy finds itself at another crossroads, facing a new democratic vista. The choice between Barack Obama and John McCain could hardly be clearer. Throughout the campaign, this magazine has called for the rise of a small-d democratic movement and supported Obama's candidacy for its attempt to galvanize new volunteers, organizers and donors united by their dedication to progressive change. His proposals on the crucial issue of this election—the economy—while imperfect, are grounded in economic reality and empathy for the plight of poor and middle-class Americans. Indeed, as the second Gilded Age comes to a screeching halt and the metastasizing economic crisis drives undecided voters to Obama, the Republican Party has responded with its familiar tactic of blaming the victims. In a vicious smear, McCain has claimed that ACORN "forced banks to issue the risky home loans" that "caused the financial crisis" and that it is "destroying the fabric of democracy" by "perpetrating one of the greatest frauds in voter history." These are outright lies told in desperation and bad faith. As Peter Dreier and John Atlas point out on page 20 of this issue, it was ACORN and other consumer advocacy groups that *fought* the predatory lending practices responsible for the subprime mess. And as Andrew Gumbel notes on page 16, ACORN's voter registration drives—which this year have enrolled 1.3 million new voters from low-income communities—"have not been shown to result in a single fraudulently cast ballot."

In fact, it is the Republican Party that threatens not just the fabric of democracy but the very thread from which it is woven—the basic premise that every eligible citizen can vote and that every eligible vote is counted. Through voter ID laws, purge lists and other maneuvers, it intends to challenge the legitimacy of millions of votes in crucial swing states like Florida, Michigan, Virginia and Ohio. These contested ballots will come from Democratic-leaning voters, but, more important, they are from the young, the newly registered, minorities and the poor—those for whom democracy is a fragile and hard-fought exercise. Thankfully, a slew of watchdog groups are poised to check such invidious efforts, but it will take vigilance to ensure that this election is free and fair and that the electoral system itself is reformed.

Just as much an affront to democracy is the GOP's other electoral strategy—to fan the flames of xenophobia and racism by linking Obama with terrorism and anti-Americanism. Such crude and spurious associations pander to the worst elements of American culture: to nativism, fear and ignorance. This is the endgame the McCain campaign has chosen to play—to degrade democratic debate through slander and to cut citizens off from democracy.

Barack Obama has a different vision of democracy, focused on enlarging the electorate and encouraging citizens to play an active role in shaping the country's policies and ordering its priorities. Our open

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## This week at thenation.com

**NEWS & ANALYSIS**
Barbara Ehrenreich: The socialist conspiracy
Katrina vanden Heuvel: Count every vote
William Deresiewicz: Decline of reading
Mark Ames: Cold war that wasn't

**PODCAST**
Town meeting on the economy

**VIDEO NATION**
The truth about ACORN

**NATION ASSOCIATES**
Make a difference


letter to Barack Obama, which was signed by nearly 25,000 people ("Change *We* Can Believe In," August 18/25), described the most inspiring principles animating his campaign while also noting the dissonance between his stances and ours on such issues as the escalation of the US military presence in Afghanistan and the death penalty. On the Letters page of this issue appears the response from his campaign, which welcomes not only our support but also our pledge to challenge him when we disagree with his stands. This response reminds us that, vital though an Obama victory is, it is only the beginning of what's needed to roll back the policies of the Bush years and begin to enact a progressive agenda. If elected, Obama will face massive entrenched power whose writ runs large in Washington. Such pressure can most effectively be countered if the raised expectations of his presidency are channeled into a movement that stands up for those without wealth and power—a movement that works for and wins a central place in the engaged and expanded democracy that Whitman envisioned a century ago.

# Swiftboat Blues

COMMENT

In late August, well before the McCain campaign started running with the topic, a group called the American Issues Project (AIP) launched a $2 million ad campaign in key swing states linking Barack Obama with former 1960s radical Bill Ayers. "Why would Barack Obama be friends with someone who bombed the Capitol and is proud of it?" the ad's narrator gravely intoned. The group was quickly likened to the now infamous Swift Boat Veterans for Truth, who in 2004 tarnished John Kerry's heroism in Vietnam and his antiwar activism back home. After all, AIP employed SBVT's PR firm and political consultant and was funded by Dallas billionaire Harold Simmons, the second-largest donor to SBVT.

Yet AIP's ad campaign has been most notable for what it lacks: the buzz, money or impact of SBVT. Obama's association with Ayers didn't re-enter the presidential race in a major way until the McCain campaign began aggressively pushing the issue in early October—and it has hurt McCain more than it's helped. AIP's second ad, on the economic crisis in early October, focused on "Senate liberals" rather than Obama.

Such is the puzzling predicament of the conservative attack machine in 2008. Outside groups independent of the McCain campaign—the shadowy PACs, nonprofits and 527s (named for a section of the tax code)—have spawned lots of SBVT imitators but no effective heirs. An analysis by one Democratic media firm found that thirteen conservative groups had spent less than $10 million on ads from May through mid-October, far less than the $20 million spent by SBVT or the $28 million by another now defunct conservative group, Progress for America, in '04. (In contrast, the Obama campaign has dropped a record-breaking $145 million on TV ads since April.)

The money may be running dry, but conservative groups are still trying to swing the election, filling the airwaves and Internet with mini–smear campaigns against Obama. The antichoice BornAliveTruth.org features an abortion "survivor" telling the camera, "If Barack Obama had his way, I wouldn't be here."

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# Noted.

**TUNE IN, TURN OUT:** In 2004, the anticipated surge in voting among traditionally Democratic constituencies—the young, minorities, low-income families—never materialized. Turnout among black and Hispanic voters trailed that of whites by at least 7 percent; people earning more than $50,000 outvoted those making less than $20,000 by 34 percent; and 72 percent of Americans 55 and older showed up at the polls, compared with only 47 percent of 18- to 24-year-olds.

But activists are optimistic that 2008 will be different. "We didn't have to go hunting for people this year," said **Katy Gall**, **ACORN**'s state director in Ohio. "People come up to us saying, 'You bet I want to vote. This election is historic.'" ACORN and **Project Vote** have partnered to sign up 1.3 million new, mostly low-income voters, including 153,898 in Pennsylvania, 151,812 in Florida and 247,335 in Ohio, all important swing states. **Rock the Vote** has accumulated an additional 2.5 million new registrations.

Smaller, more targeted efforts have also been successful. A sixty-day registration drive in eleven states organized by the **National Coalition on Black Civic Participation** signed up 60,000 new voters. Student PIRGs have helped to register 110,000 voters on college campuses; **Head Count** has registered 57,000 people just at concerts; and the **Hip Hop Caucus** has signed up 50,000 18- to 29-year-olds without a college degree, a group deeply underrepresented at the polls. Now, says Gall, "it's our job to make people understand: you are registered, you can vote." LUCAS MANN

**THE CONNERLY CON:** Judging by recent polls, voters in Colorado and Nebraska seem likely to pass anti–affirmative action ballot initiatives on November 4. Behind these measures lurks **Ward Connerly**, the former University of California regent who has made a career of opposing affirmative action to redress inequalities in college admissions, hiring and the awarding of state contracts. Connerly, who has lobbied successfully for similar initiatives in California, Michigan and Washington, has appeared on radio ads and televised debates supporting the measures in Colorado and Nebraska.

**Kristina Wilfore**, executive director of the **Ballot Initiative Strategy Center**, argues that the popularity of the measures—both are polling at better than 60 percent—is largely due to their misleading wording on state ballots. "These measures are cloaked in deception," she says, noting that they promise to end discrimination or preferential treatment for "any individual or group on the basis of race, sex, color, ethnicity, or national origin." The BISC is working to educate voters about the potential impact of the ballot measures, and has run ads drawing attention to how Connerly has benefited from his racist work. Between 1997 and 2006, Connerly paid himself $7.6 million through the two tax-exempt nonprofit organizations he runs—the **American Civil Rights Institute** and the **American Civil Rights Organization**—prompting an IRS investigation that is still in progress. COLE ROBERTSON

**BALLOT BOWL:** Conservatives are taking a whack at workers' and immigrants' rights in several states. In Missouri the state legislature is pushing **Constitutional Amendment 1**, which would designate English as the official state language, despite the fact that the legislature has never conducted a meeting in any other tongue. In Arizona anti-immigrant groups are pushing **Proposition 202**, which would punish employers by stripping them of their business licenses if they knowingly hire noncitizens who are not eligible to work in the United States. To date no employer has been prosecuted under a similar law passed in 2007 by the state legislature.

In Oregon, anti-tax zealot and perennial booster of conservative ballot efforts **Bill Sizemore** is backing three anti-labor and anti-immigrant initiatives. **Measure 60** would wipe out labor contracts by imposing "merit pay" on the state's teachers. **Measure 64** would prohibit the use of union dues for political purposes. And **Measure 58** would limit non-English-language instruction in public schools to two years. A 2002 jury found Sizemore guilty of falsifying signatures in order to qualify initiatives for the ballot and of filing false financial reports. Union contributions are also under attack in South Dakota, where Grover Norquist's **Americans for Tax Reform** is funding the deceptively titled Open and Clean Government Act. If passed, it too would prohibit labor unions from contributing to political campaigns or lobbying the state government. ROBERT ESHELMAN

**ROW E FOR OBAMA:** We all know it's critical that **Barack Obama** win this election, but we also know that an Obama win in itself will not build the movement we need to reconstruct our country. In November, many of us can cast our vote only for Obama, not for the broader democratic movement that is so badly needed. Except in New York. Thanks to the state's "fusion" voting system, New Yorkers can vote on the **Working Families Party** (WFP) ballot line, voting for Obama and also for the movement needed to push him and Congress to the left. Founded in 1998, the WFP has used its ballot line as leverage to force passage of a higher state minimum wage, a higher income tax on New York's wealthy, reform of the Rockefeller drug laws, public financing of elections and much more.

*The Nation* was an early supporter of the WFP, and we've watched with pleasure as it has grown, combining a broad progressive vision with concrete political victories. We've also run articles critical of it (which prompted WFP letters in kind), and the WFP has sometimes endorsed candidates we've criticized. That said, *The Nation* and the WFP share the belief that the path to a revived progressive politics runs through a reinvigorated labor movement and must be built on a multiracial foundation.

Some of us support Obama with unalloyed enthusiasm, while others regard his victory as essential simply to avoid the catastrophe of another four years of Republican rule. But all of us know that the real work doesn't end with a new administration in Washington. It will be more urgent than ever to organize locally and build a clear alternative to the neoliberal consensus of both parties. By supporting Obama and the Democrats on the WFP line, **Row E**, New Yorkers can begin that work now. (For a longer version of this article, go to thenation.com/edcut.)

KATRINA VANDEN HEUVEL

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The Judicial Confirmation Network slams Obama for consorting with Ayers, the Rev. Jeremiah Wright and Tony Rezko while voting against the confirmation of Justices John Roberts and Samuel Alito. The Committee for Truth in Politics alleges that Obama "voted to allow early release for convicted sexual abusers." RightChange.com, funded by two pharmaceutical executives, describes Obama's tax plan thus: "new welfare handouts [and] tax rates as high as 54 percent." (Most of these ads use gross distortions to make their case, just as the SBVT did.)

The net effect is to portray Obama as a bomb-throwing, baby-killing, big-government radical. But these messages have yet to find an audience beyond a sliver of the conservative base. "Wright, Rezko, Ayers—I think we're way past all that," says Republican operative Roger Stone, a veteran of GOP attack campaigns who is sitting this election out. "They were important as building blocks, but they don't matter anymore." The time to define Obama ideologically, Stone argues, was months ago.

There's no single explanation for why conservative groups have been lagging. Jonathan Martin of *Politico*, who follows the McCain campaign, has pointed to "tougher FEC regulations that make it more difficult to launch attacks that aren't tied to an issue, donor fatigue, lack of enthusiasm among Republicans for McCain…[and] a fear that their party's nominee will publicly denounce them and hold a grudge."

The broader implosion of the conservative movement also helps account for the impotence of these groups. Take the example of Freedom's Watch, founded with great fanfare last year by casino magnate Sheldon Adelson and advised by Bush White House veterans like Ari Fleischer and Karl Rove. Though projected to spend $200 million, the group was beset by infighting and spent less than $40,000 between May and September. Freedom's Watch has been MIA during the presidential election.

Or consider Floyd Brown, the GOP operative who masterminded the devastating "Willie Horton" ad against Michael Dukakis in 1988. Brown planned a sequel for Obama, asking in one ad, "Was Obama ever a Muslim?" and in another, "Can a man so weak in the war on gangs be trusted in the war on terror?" Yet Brown has spent only $389,536, limiting the ads to the web and a direct-mail campaign that hasn't garnered recent media attention. Other organizations have experienced similar struggles. In Macomb County, Michigan—a "Reagan Democratic" stronghold—Freedom's Defense Fund ran a series of racially incendiary ads linking Obama to Wright and disgraced Detroit Mayor Kwame Kilpatrick, only to see McCain pull out of the state after Obama racked up a double-digit lead in the polls.

The most expensive ad campaign comes from Let Freedom Ring, founded in 2004 by conservative activist Colin Hanna and funded by Christian philanthropist John Templeton Jr. In mid-October the group spent $5 million examining "the often overlooked consequences of a leftist takeover of our government"—namely, "massively higher taxes, an enormous increase in restrictive regulations, a diminished military…."

To be successful, attacks from the right must be amplified by the mainstream media it so often reviles. Another group, Our Country Deserves Better PAC, released an ad tying Obama to Wright, Che Guevara and Hamas. It attracted front-page placement on Mark Halperin's popular *Time* blog under the headline Anti-Obama Greatest Hits Hits, even though the group had spent a paltry $72,635 (since then it has poured four times that much into ad buys). Halperin also featured an ad by a PAC called the National Republican Trust, which crudely links Obama to the 9/11 hijackers based on his past support for driver's licenses for illegal immigrants (a policy also backed by the Bush administration). The group has so far spent less than $200,000. This online attention hasn't been matched by the cable news networks, which have largely ignored the ads.

Another major reason conservative groups haven't had a big impact this election: unlike the timid Kerry campaign (which didn't initially hit back hard against SBVT), the Obama campaign has aggressively countered the attacks, urging TV stations not to run them, challenging the legality of certain organizations, debunking false charges on the website FightTheSmears.com and launching response ads of its own. Obama's ability to shape the political landscape—through an unprecedented amount of money and a sophisticated organization—has forced the McCain campaign and the Republican National Committee to carry out the dirty work themselves, risking a significant public backlash. As McCain has continued to lag in the polls, the RNC and state parties have blanketed swing states with robocalls and mailers tying Obama to criminals and terrorists. (Traditional single-issue groups like the NRA are also targeting Obama.)

It's still possible that such attacks will scare enough voters away from Obama for McCain to prevail. But it doesn't seem likely, as Republicans are still fighting the last war, attached to SBVT nostalgia at a time when the slumping economy makes such smears look petty and shrill. Operatives like Roger Stone are already resigned to defeat—and looking forward to their next shot. "We're at the end of an eight-year run," Stone says. "There will be no lack of 527 money in the Congressional elections in two years, when President Obama is so unpopular he can't appear in public." Something for Republicans to hope for.

ARI BERMAN

*Ari Berman, a* Nation *contributing writer, is a Nation Institute fellow.*

## Calvin Trillin, Deadline Poet

### The Republicans Change to a New Robocall Message After Colin Powell Endorses Barack Obama on *Meet the Press*

Well, Powell is Obama's friend.
He said so on the show.
And this Obama worked with Ayers.
We thought you'd want to know.

Yes, Powell pals around with pals
Of terrorists. It's proved.
If he's no terrorist himself,
He's simply once removed.

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# The Raucous Caucus

COMMENT

When the nation's newest Congresswoman arrived in Maine in August to campaign for a fellow Democrat seeking an open House seat, she tossed aside the cautious talking points peddled by the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee (DCCC). Maryland's Donna Edwards, who won a House seat in a June special election, was talking about how she and candidate Chellie Pingree would shake up Washington come January. Topic A: renewing the Constitution. Recalling her third House vote, on a rewrite of the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act—which majority leader Steny Hoyer wanted Democrats to back despite its failure to address privacy concerns adequately—Edwards told Pingree backers in Cape Elizabeth, "I had to walk up to him on the floor of the United States Congress, and I had to tell him, 'Steny, I will not vote for that FISA bill. And I won't do it because I think that there is a way to protect the security of the United States, and there is a way to gather intelligence, that doesn't intrude on…the rights of the American public. And we haven't done that with FISA.' And I told him that and then I went right over and cast my vote against that."

To the cheers of Maine Democrats who, like their compatriots across the country, recognize that Washington will change only if the party's Congressional caucus develops an edgier, more aggressively progressive stance, Edwards continued, "I know that Chellie Pingree is gonna be that kind of stand-up, I've-got-a-little-backbone Democrat." That's not just rhetoric; before they became candidates, Edwards and Pingree worked together as Washington outsiders promoting campaign finance, election and media reforms that put them decidedly at odds with the Bush administration and some of their fellow Democrats.

Edwards and Pingree are members of a loose sorority of Democratic women inspired to run for Congress by a shared sense that their party should do more to end the occupation in Iraq, defend civil liberties and stand up for economic justice. These women look likely to prevail in a year when Democrats are set to expand their House majority dramatically—perhaps flipping as many as the thirty-one GOP seats the party won in 2006, which gave it narrow control of the chamber.

But many Democrats elected in 2006 were satisfied simply to stamp a D on the Capitol, and frustration with the tepidness of House challenges to Bush administration policies and with the stale, bipartisan status quo—which has given Congress worse approval ratings than the president—has drawn a remarkable field of experienced activists into House races. Some, like Edwards, former executive director of the National Network to End Domestic Violence and the progressive Arca Foundation, and Pingree, former president of Common Cause, are nationally known reformers; others, like Washington State's Darcy Burner, are business leaders with long histories of community involvement; still others, like New Jersey's Linda Stender and Nevada's Dina Titus, developed their skills as state legislators.

What unites these progressive women, aside from their gender and their track records of getting things done, is a belief that a Democratic Congress must be about more than merely opposing Republicans. "I'm a big Democrat, right, but I also know that sometimes we don't get it quite right," explains Edwards. "We need people in Congress who are going to hold Democrats' feet to the fire so that we do right by the American people—who aren't going to just follow the party line, but who are going to make sure that the party line is the right line to follow."

Burner and Pingree illustrated what that might mean earlier this year, when they collaborated with Edwards to produce their Responsible Plan to End the War in Iraq, a far more detailed strategy than that of House Democratic leaders. "The people inside the Beltway don't seem to get how big an issue this is," explained Burner, a former Microsoft executive who, after almost beating a popular Republican incumbent in 2006, kept on campaigning. Eventually, sixty Democratic House and Senate candidates endorsed the Responsible Plan, including military veteran Eric Massa, another narrow loser from the 2006 election who appears poised to unseat a GOP incumbent in New York State this year. Indeed, while many of the candidates likely to make up what Edwards calls the "raucous caucus" of next year's newcomers are women, there are also men like Massa and another vet, Ashwin Madia, who is campaigning for an open seat in Minnesota. And as the economy has taken center stage, Burner, Pingree and other backers of the Responsible Plan have taken the lead in talking about the importance of shifting spending from failed foreign adventures to rebuilding America.

Barring unexpected twists on the campaign trail, many of these determined Democrats are going to win. Senior Republicans, frustrated by the decline in their party's fortunes, are quitting the House, creating more open-seat contests than usual. One is in Ohio, where Democrat Mary Jo Kilroy, an economic populist who emphasizes creating green jobs, is likely to replace exiting Republican Deborah Pryce. Several GOP incumbents who stayed on—like Minnesota's bombastic McCarthyite Michele Bachmann, who suddenly faces a serious challenge from Democrat El Tinklenberg, a minister who calls the election "a referendum on Bachmann" and the extreme right—are suffering from their association with an administration rendered even more unpopular by the financial meltdown and with the angry campaign of John McCain. Three weeks before election day, DCCC chair Chris Van Hollen expanded the number of seats targeted by the committee's Red to Blue program. It's now taking aim at sixty seats—almost a third of the GOP caucus.

Democrats are unlikely to win all of them, and a handful of the caucus's more cautiously conservative 2006 winners are vulnerable after failing to make an impression—or stumbling personally—in districts that lean Republican. But the Democrats have a very good chance of picking up seats in regions where Obama's candidacy is expected to boost turnout—Burner's in the Seattle area, the California coast district where Huntington Beach Mayor Debbie Cook is running against senior Republican Dana Rohrabacher and the Albuquerque district where Democrat Martin Heinrich is likely to replace exiting Republican Heather Wilson. In addition to being more Democratic, the next House will likely be more progressive—particularly on issues of war and peace, fair trade and civil liberties. Many of the new progressives will be experienced women arriving with a determination to shake off the caution of the last Democratic Congress and, in Pingree's words, "reclaim our country now—by ending the war in Iraq, by strengthening the middle class that has been so weakened under the Bush administration and by restoring accountability to government."

JOHN NICHOLS

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# Rocking the Black Vote

COMMENT

In October, as trumped-up accusations of voter fraud swirled around ACORN, another national grassroots voter registration drive aimed at low-income and ethnic communities steamed along, under the radar of the mainstream press and the Republican operatives hoping to challenge such efforts. Called 1-866-MYVOTE1, it is headed by African-American disc jockey Tom Joyner. His *Tom Joyner Morning Show*, fourteen years old this year, broadcasts nationwide on 115 radio stations, reaching more than 8 million weekday listeners. His website, blackamericaweb.com, receives 3.5 million page views per month. The tagline of his site and his show is Party With a Purpose, which usually refers to Joyner's on-air campaigns to improve African-American educational and employment opportunities, and to raise awareness about health issues. But for most of this year, his four-hour morning broadcasts have stirred a big dose of political consciousness into the show's lively hodgepodge of classic R&B and light hip-hop, played between bits of comic shtick involving misbehaving celebrities and athletes. In each morning show, listeners get brief humor-laced segments centered on voter registration and on election-day poll monitoring.

Like the efforts of right-wing radio personalities Rush Limbaugh and Dr. Laura Schlessinger, Joyner's initiative derives its strength from the relationship between the DJ and his listeners. But unlike his conservative counterparts, Joyner downplays rhetoric endorsing individual candidates—he supports Obama but has made no official endorsement—in favor of touting the 1-866-MYVOTE1 campaign as a nonpartisan effort to provide voter registration and polling place information and to give his listeners a way of reporting, in real time, problems they encounter at their local balloting place. Listen to his program daily and you will hear relentless references to 1-866-MYVOTE1, all delivered in cheery language free of rancor.

"Politics is never a sexy subject," Joyner said in a phone interview from his Dallas studio in early October. "We're in the business of reaching as many people as we can. That's how we stay in business. But in taking up topics like politics and health, or unemployment or the economy, we've found that our formula for success is to put humor with it." In his twice-weekly "Trickery Updates," he turns to Ken Smukler, a political and technology consultant in Philadelphia, for jocular updates on signs of polling irregularities around the nation. Smukler built Joyner's call-in voter information and poll-monitoring system after determining that two principal factors had contributed to problems at polls in Florida in 2000 and in Ohio in 2004: voters' lack of information about the process and particulars of registering and voting, and the fact that many polling places lack the resources and well-trained staff to handle large numbers of voters.

"I think that prior to our work in 2004, most people underestimated the importance of voters having basic information of the process," Smukler said. He introduced a similar call-in, get-out-the-vote initiative on Joyner's program leading up to the 2004 election; that version, though, didn't have a robust poll-monitoring component. Voters standing in long lines outside polls in Cleveland or El Paso grew more frustrated by the hour, especially if their cellphone calls to local election officials resulted in busy signals or voicemail rabbit holes, Smukler said.

Investigations of possible improprieties in 2000 and 2004 have incorrectly focused on failing machines or hanging chads, says Smukler. "Far more voters are disenfranchised by lack of information than by machine failure or misfeasance or malfeasance by some elections board. But there was no way of knowing this without building a system to monitor and aggregate information." Voters standing in line this year, though, can call 1-866-MYVOTE1 to report problems. During the primaries six calls per minute came into the poll-monitoring wing of the hot line, Joyner said. Information from callers at polling places was farmed out to a rapid-response team of NAACP lawyers—the NAACP's National Voter Fund is partnered with Joyner's initiative—who were dispatched to polling places to challenge local election officials on attempts to bar voters from participating. The jump squad will be in place on November 4, too.

How many new voters can be attributed to Joyner's effort? It's impossible to know, but as of mid-October, 1-866-MYVOTE1 was in position to "put a dent" in the bloc of 8 million estimated unregistered African-American voters, Joyner said. His operation has received more than 600,000 calls this year requesting voter registration forms and information on local precincts. In the weeks before November 4, those people are getting follow-up callbacks—nonpartisan robocalls—reminding them to check their voter status and to vote.

When I asked Smukler about some black Americans' sense that election officials or some other unseen force might be trying to sabotage their votes, he paused. "I'd say there is a conspiracy in the sense that, yes, poor communities in America always are struggling with inadequate resources," he said, "in schools, in jobs and, when it comes to voting, in not having enough equipment or enough updated equipment."

Gregory Moore, executive director of the NAACP's National Voter Fund, says Joyner's campaign is aiding the nation's oldest civil rights organization in updating its ground-based, door-knocking registration drives; and it's contributing to the image makeover the NAACP embarked on early this year when it named Benjamin Jealous, who is in his 30s, as its chief. "This opens up a new avenue of work that we've been doing for years," Moore said. "Beyond the marches, lawsuits and our work pushing for legislative change, we now also have our Upload and Uplift campaign, where we encourage and show people how to register online." The partnership with Joyner, Moore added, is also a handy way of data-mining for voter information that will be of use to NAACP efforts down the line.

Joyner's long-term goal is to keep up the drumbeat encouraging his mostly African-American listeners to engage in voting and electoral politics. "This is what black disc jockeys have always done, been a lifeline of sorts to our listeners," said Joyner, a native of Tuskegee, Alabama. "When people would have some problems, traditionally, black radio was there to broadcast it, to get the word out in the community, to help get people driven to where they need to be, or help a family, or what have you. We're doing what black radio has always done but now with a different platform."

AMY ALEXANDER

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# Alexander Cockburn

## Against Obama

A climate of intolerance? An ugly mood at the McCain/Palin rallies? Ever alert to the brownshirt menace, liberals read press reports from Ohio and Wisconsin with a *frisson*. So where have they been these past few months? Try going into a typical progressive household to make an argument against Obama and for a Nader vote. A couple of lifelong radical friends of mine whisper to me that in their homes and workplaces they've given up straight talk about Obama altogether and feel free to talk, sotto voce, only in public parks.

In these last days I've been scraping around, trying to muster a single positive reason to encourage a vote for Obama. Please note my accent on the positive, since the candidate himself has couched his appeal in this idiom. Why vote *for* Obama, as opposed to *against* the Palin-Wurzelbacher ticket?

Obama invokes change. Yet never has the dead hand of the past had a "reform" candidate so firmly by the windpipe. Is it possible to confront America's problems without talking about the arms budget, now entirely out of control? The Pentagon is spending more than at any point since the end of World War II. In "real dollars" the $635 billion appropriated in fiscal 2007 is 5 percent above the previous all-time high, reached in 1952. Depending on how you count them, the Empire has somewhere between 700 and 1,000 overseas bases. Obama wants to enlarge the armed services by 90,000. He pledges to escalate the US war in Afghanistan; to attack Pakistan's sovereign territory if it obstructs any unilateral US mission to kill Osama bin Laden; and to wage a war against terror in a hundred countries, creating for this purpose a new international intelligence and law enforcement "infrastructure" to take down terrorist networks. A fresh start? Where does this differ from Bush's commitment to Congress on September 20, 2001, to an ongoing "war on terror" against "every terrorist group of global reach" and "any nation that continues to harbor or support terrorism"?

Obama's liberal defenders comfort themselves with the thought that "he had to say that to get elected." He didn't. After eight years of Bush, Americans are receptive to reassessing America's imperial role. Obama has shunned this opportunity. If elected he will be prisoner of his promise that on his watch Afghanistan will not be lost, nor the white man's burden shirked.

Whatever drawdown of troops in Iraq that does take place in the event of Obama's victory will be a brief hiccup amid the blare and thunder of fresh "resolve." In the event of Obama's victory, the most immediate consequence overseas will most likely be brusque imperial reassertion. Already Joe Biden, the shopworn poster boy for Israeli intransigence and cold war hysteria, is yelping stridently about the new administration's "mettle" being tested in the first six months by the Russians and their surrogates.

After eight years of unrelenting assault on constitutional liberties by Bush and Cheney, public and judicial enthusiasm for tyranny has waned. Obama has preferred to stand with Bush and Cheney. In February, seeking a liberal profile in the primaries, Obama stood against warrantless wiretapping. His support for liberty did not survive its second trimester; he aborted it with a vote for warrantless wiretapping. The man who voted to reaffirm the Patriot Act declared that "the ability to monitor and track individuals who want to attack the United States is a vital counterterrorism tool."

Every politician, good or bad, is an ambitious opportunist. But beneath this topsoil, the ones who make a constructive dent on history have some bedrock of consistency, of fidelity to some central idea. In Obama's case, this "idea" is the ultimate distillation of identity politics: the idea of his blackness. Those who claim that if he were white he would be cantering effortlessly into the White House do not understand that without his most salient physical characteristic Obama would be seen as a second-tier senator with unimpressive credentials. As a political organizer of his own advancement, Obama is a wonder. But I have yet to identify a single uplifting intention to which he has remained constant if it has presented the slightest risk to his advancement. Summoning all the optimism at my disposal, I suppose we could say he has not yet had occasion to offend two important constituencies and adjust his relatively decent stances on immigration and labor-law reform. Public funding of his campaign? A commitment made becomes a commitment betrayed, just as on warrantless eavesdropping. His campaign treasury is now a vast hogswallow that, if it had been amassed by a Republican, would be the topic of thunderous liberal complaint.

In substantive terms Obama's run has been the negation of almost every decent progressive principle, a negation achieved with scarcely a bleat of protest from the progressives seeking to hold him to account. The Michael Moores stay silent. Abroad, Obama stands for imperial renaissance. He has groveled before the Israel lobby and pandered to the sourest reflexes of the cold war era. At home he has crooked the knee to bankers and Wall Street, to the oil companies, the coal companies, the nuclear lobby, the big agricultural combines. He has been fearless in offending progressives, constant in appeasing the powerful.

So no, this is not an exciting or liberating moment in America's politics such as was possible after the Bush years. If you want a memento of what could be exciting, I suggest you go to the website of the Nader-Gonzalez campaign and read its platform, particularly on popular participation and initiative. Or read the portions of Libertarian Bob Barr's platform on foreign policy and constitutional rights. Cynthia McKinney is now making nutty claims about 5,000 post-Katrina executions; otherwise I'd include her.

Do you really want to be on the same side as Alan Dershowitz, Colin Powell and Christopher Hitchens? ■

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# Katha Pollitt

## Culture War: Out of Juice?

The right seems to have decided that the culture war, like just about everything else, sells better if promoted by attractive youthful spokesmoms. Goodbye Pat Buchanan, hello Sarah Palin—and an especially big shout-out to that bright-eyed smiling newcomer to the national hate sweeps, Minnesota Representative Michele Bachmann. Bachmann, as you may know, has become a YouTube star, thanks to her interview on *Hardball*, in which, talking to an incredulous Chris Matthews, she called for the news media to ferret out "anti-American" members of Congress.

The stronger Obama gets, the more unhinged the Republicans become—at least, those Republicans who haven't already detached (Chris Buckley! Colin Powell! Charles Krauthammer! Peggy Noonan! Kenneth Adelman!)—although to be fair, Bachmann has been sending bulletins from Outer Wingnuttia for quite a while. In August she mocked Nancy Pelosi for "global warming fanaticism.... She has said that she's just trying to save the planet. We all know that someone did that over 2,000 years ago." Bachmann also claimed that Democrats want high gas prices in order to force Americans to move to "the inner city." Watch out, Real America, Democrats want to turn you into black people!

Many are worried about the way the McCain campaign has revved up the culture war—Bill Ayers is more famous right now than Obama's earlier BFF Paris Hilton, to say nothing of Reverend Wright, ACORN *a k a* perpetrator of "one of the greatest frauds in voter history," secret Muslims, socialism, exotic Hawaii, Joe the Plumber, small towns, the real Virginia and the pro-America parts of the country. (According to McCain, if Obama had only agreed to do ten town hall debates with him, none of this mud would be slung now. It's as if he's blaming Obama for his own decision to take the low road. You leave me no choice, sir, but to lie and slander in a most ridiculous fashion! So much for Republicans standing for self-reliance and responsibility.) Sometimes it does feel like McCain, by choosing Sarah Palin, has lifted up a rock and revealed the national id in all its unregenerate glory, seething with racism, paranoia, McCarthyism, xenophobia and bigotry.

And yet this is the country where every poll suggests that these appeals to the devils of our nature aren't working their mojo. It may have taken the collapse of the global financial system to get Americans to elect a black man president, but give the voters a little credit: it could just happen.

Not too much credit, though. The culture war may fail at the top of the ticket, but it still has enough juice to do damage further down. This year's state ballot initiatives offer numerous opportunities for social conservatives to damage women's health and human rights: Californians can vote to require parental notification on abortion, a measure they've rejected twice but which looks likely to pass this time around. South Dakotans can vote to ban abortion entirely, with narrowly tailored exceptions for rape, incest and serious injury to the woman's health—just make sure you report being raped by your brother immediately and that your doctor is prepared to risk ten years in prison if his colleagues think he's erred on the side of keeping you alive. For the true fetal fan, though, Colorado is the place to be: there voters can choose to declare that human personhood, with all its legal protections, begins with the fertilized egg, putting at risk not only legal abortion but also emergency contraception, the pill, chemotherapy and other medically necessary procedures, to say nothing of in vitro fertilization (protecting fertilized eggs, it turns out, is more important even than creating a born child).

The old standby, banning gay marriage, is on the ballot in California, Arizona and Florida, even as in October Connecticut became the third state whose Supreme Court ruled that same-sexers had a right to wed. With twenty-seven states already having added marriage bans to their constitutions, the day will soon be upon us when every state with enough homophobes to pass a ban will have done so. What will social conservatives do then? Some 35 percent of Americans support gay marriage, and that number is on the rise. After all, young people are much more tolerant of homosexuality than their elders. And if you leave aside biblical fulminations and lies (like, legalizing same-sex marriage will force schools to teach kindergartners about anal sex), the arguments against gay marriage are pretty feeble. I almost felt sorry for family values think-tanker David Blankenhorn, who argued in a recent *Los Angeles Times* op-ed that gay marriage is wrong because the universal purpose of marriage throughout history has been to give children two parents, one of each sex. Where to begin? Single parenting, donor sperm and eggs, blended families, the millions of marriages among people who can't, won't or don't procreate but who imagine their marriages are as valid as that of, say, the superfertile Sarah and Todd Palin. Oh, and the mounting evidence that children raised by same-sex couples turn out just fine. There are days Blankenhorn, who describes himself as a "liberal Democrat," must feel he earns every dime of the many millions his Institute for American Values gets from Bradley, Scaife and other right-wing foundations.

On the plus side, Californians can also vote for Proposition 2, which improves conditions for factory-farm animals, and Proposition 5, which would provide almost a half-billion dollars for drug treatment programs. In general, though, progressives and feminists have been slow to use ballot initiatives to forward our causes. One big opportunity is coming up in Milwaukee, where a coalition of activists have placed an initiative on the ballot that would give workers nine paid sick days a year. Number legally mandated now? Zero. Workers risk losing their jobs if they stay out because of illness or to care for a sick child or parent. This callous policy hits women hardest, but it's bad for everyone—co-workers, restaurant diners, families. Could the Milwaukee measure spark a national grassroots movement? Show them some love by donating at www.9to5.org. ■

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JASON E. MICZEK/AP

Barack Obama in Asheville in early October

# Obamalina

North Carolinians have fallen, surprisingly, for Barack Obama. But how hard?

**by BOB MOSER**

Surely this had to be some kind of mistake, or cruel hoax. It was the weekend before the second presidential debate, and the *New York Times* was reporting that Barack Obama had hunkered down in a battleground state to do his prep—while also holding a jubilant rally in local Republican territory and crashing the year's most exclusive state Democratic fundraiser in a "surprise," media-snatching visit. All of which made perfect sense. What defied credulity was the story's dateline: Asheville, North Carolina.

My home state, where I spent decades suffering serial heartbreaks along with my fellow progressives, where Al Gore and John Kerry withdrew their campaigns by Labor Day, where George W. Bush won last time by twelve points—my home state was suddenly a toss-up. It had gone from red to pink to indefinite on the cable TV maps just since last spring. Best known to many as the place that gave us Jesse Helms, North Carolina now could—to the astonishment of almost every pundit inside and outside the state—shift its fifteen electoral votes and help seal the deal for the nation's first African-American president. It was the most surprising thing this side of Indiana.

"When we started this campaign," Obama crowed to 700 Democratic heavies and a bank of local-news cameras at the Vance-Aycock Dinner he'd "crashed," "we said we were going to change the political map. And people said no, it can't be done." But "we kept coming down to North Carolina.… And despite the pundits, despite the prognosticators, despite the cynicism, thirty days out, we are right here in the hunt in North Carolina. We can win at the top [of the ballot] in North Carolina, and we can win at the bottom of the ballot in North Carolina."

This was Obama's third straight weekend in the state—eye-popping for a place that hasn't gone Democratic for president since 1976, and has seen only one pair of nominee's wingtips pounding its pavement since then—Bill Clinton's in 1992, when he lost the state to George H.W. Bush by a hair. And if Obama was sounding triumphal in Asheville, it's because winning North Carolina would be sweet not only for the obvious reason of helping him get past 270 electoral votes. It would also vindicate his campaign's extension of Democratic National Committee chair Howard Dean's fifty-state project into the presidential election.

Like Dean before him, Obama was questioned for putting cash and people into states like Georgia and North Carolina, despite their increasing Democratic leanings and rapidly changing demographics. North Carolina, where 3.5 million voted in 2004, gained 1.5 million legal residents from 1996 to 2006—plenty of newcomers to fundamentally alter the state's voting patterns. But while he's given up on full-scale efforts in Georgia, Obama's North Carolina campaign, undergirded by 1,700 volunteers, forty offices and close to 400 paid staffers (McCain has thirty offices but only thirty paid staff), has outregistered Republicans five to one in the state this year and drawn even in the polls heading into the campaign's last weeks. In the first week of early voting, in mid-October, almost three times as many Democrats as Republicans were casting ballots in a record turnout; while African-Americans are only 22 percent of the state's population, almost 40 percent of early voters were black. Obama's been running many more ads in the state than McCain—and gearing them, spot-on, to the economic troubles shared by working-class Carolinians, who've suffered some of the nation's highest job losses, and overspending white-collar families around Raleigh-Durham and Charlotte, which was recently rocked by the implosion of Wachovia, one of several banks headquartered in the city.

It does not hurt a bit that North Carolina Democrats, who

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have built a powerful grassroots machine under the leadership of innovative state chair Jerry Meek, have outhustled the Republicans. So has the Obama campaign. Obama, his wife, Michelle, and running mate Joe Biden have all stumped in the state's swelling metropolitan areas—where they need to rack up a big margin, especially among the many younger independents from out of state working in banking, universities and tech—as well as in the military country of the coast and the largely white, conservative terrain of the mountains. Unlike McCain, Obama has fine-tuned his message for local ears, repeating, with the slightest hint of a twang, the themes that have consistently won Democrats most statewide offices—better jobs, better education, more responsible government. "I want y'all to listen to this," he said in Asheville at his rally in blazing sunshine. "My opponent, Senator McCain—his campaign has announced they plan to, and I quote, 'turn the page' on the discussion about this economy and spend the final weeks of his campaign launching Swiftboat-style attacks on me." The crowd hooted, just as they hooted at Obama's invocation of McCain's name.

"You're trying to pay your bills every week and stay above water. You can't ignore the economy!" Heads nodded all around, yes, yes. "You're worrying about whether your job will be there a month from now. You can't ignore the economy!" Whoo! "You're worrying about whether you can pay your mortgage and stay in your house. You can't turn the page and stop thinking about the economy!"

It's the right message at the right time in a state where Democrats outnumber Republicans 46 to 32 percent. But was Obama—is he—the right candidate to preach this new populist gospel? A new North Carolina, one that would never have gone for Jesse Helms, is rapidly emerging. November 4 will test how far the evolution has come. It will also test how much of native, white North Carolina is ready to come along for the ride.

The opening lines of the University of North Carolina's fight song go like this: "I'm a Tar Heel born, I'm a Tar Heel bred, and when I die, I'm a Tar Heel dead." These are hardly profound sentiments when you look at them on the page or yell them at basketball games, but they say some revealing things about the state where I lived my first thirty-six years—in other words, about the old North Carolina. We'll get to the new one shortly.

The Tar Heels I grew up around in the '70s and reported on in the '90s carried the spirit of that song in their DNA: funny, proud and self-deprecating all at once. After all, there we were, cheering to the notion that when we die, well, that's all she wrote. We're dead Tar Heels. Yee-hah!

The state has always been one of the nation's weirdest political places. While North Carolinians have long been prone to noting that someone once called us "a valley of humility between two mountains of conceit"—those being South Carolina and Virginia—we have also had a tendency to make bold and cranky choices, both liberal and conservative, when it comes to electing people. At the ballot box, we were never humble. We were closer to schizophrenic.

It is true, as Democratic consultant Mac McCorkle says, that North Carolina qualifies as "the most advanced outpost of liberalism in the South." That's been the case, in fact, since the nineteenth century, when the state led the country in funding higher education and other such socialistic things. A century ago, Governor Charles Brantley Aycock advocated free, universal public education for blacks and whites alike. A few decades earlier, North Carolinians had voted down secession, only to have their legislature capitulate. The state lost more men in the Civil War than any other, but also welcomed home an outsize share of Confederate deserters. Fool us once… While Democrats dominated here for the rotten hundred years after the war, as they did everywhere in Dixie, there was a difference: North Carolina had not only a strong traditionalist wing fighting for Democratic dominance but also a moderately progressive wing with some electoral oomph.

The seminal twentieth-century showdown between the traditionalists and the modernists (excellent terms for the state's dueling ideologies, courtesy of Democratic legislator and historian Paul Luebke) came right at its midpoint: the 1950 primary battle for US Senate between former marine and aggressive liberal Frank Porter Graham and segregationist rabble-rouser Willis Smith. It was a doozy. Fliers were plastered around the state with the Klan-like warning White People, Wake Up and a doctored photo of Graham's wife supposedly dancing with a Negro. Another flier was circulated, pretending to support Graham as the candidate of the "National Society for the Advancement of Colored People."

A new North Carolina, one that would never have gone for Jesse Helms, is rapidly emerging. Nov. 4 will test how far the evolution has come.

The dark side won that one narrowly, in a runoff, but the Graham campaign spawned progressive Terry Sanford. In 1960, at the height of the South's civil rights backlash, Sanford beat a staunch segregationist to become governor. (He also became the first major Southern politician to give JFK his blessing, and the Catholic candidate carried the state.) At his inaugural, two years before George Wallace's famous "segregation forever" speech, Sanford declared segregation over, sending shock waves through the South and making headlines across the country. Twelve years later, we elected Jesse Helms to his first of five interminable terms. Go figure.

Helms wrecked our reputation. But while the rest of the country, understandably enough, began to characterize our politics with the misleading evidence offered by the bespectacled bigot, the state remained mostly Democratic through the reigns of Nixon, Reagan and the Bushes. Most of the Republicans who broke through statewide were from the politer, Chamber of Commerce wing of the party—folks who held their noses whenever Jesse and his true believers came around.

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Helms-style Republicanism never flew in North Carolina—unless it was being delivered by the man himself, who had a strange connection with the antic, nonconformist, hell-raising side of us. Helms and his band of right-wing fundraisers repeatedly backed cloned candidates for Congress, Senate and governor, and they usually didn't make it out of the GOP primaries. That's partly because the millions of nonnative Republicans who moved to the state, swelling the party's ranks in the 1980s and '90s, tended to be social moderates who didn't like being married to the religious right—and who have shown a tendency to be swing voters when the Republican candidate is too hard-core, or when they simply like the Democrat better. (This time, the Democrats are poised to pick up another Congressional seat, giving them an 8-to-5 edge in North Carolina, with former textile worker Larry Kissell leading five-term incumbent Robin Hayes [see Moser, "Mill Hill Populism," May 12].)

According to longtime Republican consultant Paul Shumaker, who advised first-term Senator Richard Burr in his 2004 victory over former Clinton aide Erskine Bowles, Republican candidates in 1980s North Carolina could count on winning 85 percent of their party's base from the get-go. "These days, candidates like Richard Burr start out their campaigns assured of only about 60 percent of their party's vote," he estimated in 2006. Considering that there are already a lot more Democrats than Republicans in the state, that lack of GOP loyalty could be deadly for many Novembers to come.

North Carolina is likely to become a presidential battleground for several cycles. That means more national Democratic money and presence—and, ironically, uncertainty for the dominant state Democrats. "In terms of presidential politics, we've been kind of on the fringe," state chair Meek told me in the spring of 2007. Has that cost NC Democrats? I asked him. "There are mixed perspectives," he said. "If the DNC thought North Carolina was important enough in play to spend significant resources here, then the RNC would probably have the same reaction. Is it a wash?… Clearly in terms of infrastructure, in terms of organization, in terms of resources, the NCDP is in much better shape than the North Carolina Republican Party. And we kind of like it that way."

On the other hand, Meek said all those months ago, "I'm much more optimistic about the prospect for a Democratic nominee winning in North Carolina in 2008 than at any time in the recent past. There are a lot of changes going on. We're one of the fastest-growing states in the country, and people who are moving into places like RTP [Research Triangle Park], to the Charlotte area, the Triad area [Winston-Salem, High Point and Greensboro] are increasingly willing to vote Democratic at the federal level. They tend to be fiscally conservative, but they don't tend to have so many hang-ups about the cultural issues. That doesn't seem to drive their vote in the way that it does for some of the more traditional Republicans in North Carolina."

This year moderate Republicans and independents have one GOP candidate they can cheer wholeheartedly: former Charlotte mayor and gubernatorial candidate Pat McCrory, the sort of Republican who raised taxes in his city to pay for mass transit. McCrory is quick-witted, accent free, like so many new North Carolinians, and despite some unpopular stances (including on education, where he has talked about rolling back innovative Democratic programs), he has a good chance to knock off Lieutenant Governor Bev Perdue, an awkward debater and spawn of the corrupt Democratic machine in Raleigh. That's the bright spot for Republicans. Elsewhere it's gloom, doom and desperation for the NC GOP.

By contrast, North Carolina progressives are giddy as hell and worried sick, both. What we remember, most vividly and horrifyingly, is 1990—the other seminal matchup of the last century. Ol' Jesse was running for re-election for the four millionth time, all the while conducting surgical strikes against the National Endowment for the Arts, the judicial system and global democracy. His opponent was former Charlotte mayor Harvey Gantt, a handsome, genial Democrat with personal integrity and the guts to say that he was "proud to be a liberal." He was also the African-American who had famously integrated Clemson University in 1963—at a time when Helms was rabble-rousing nightly on the state's widest-reaching TV station. The same year that Gantt matriculated at Clemson, Helms blustered into the camera, "The Negro cannot count forever on the kind of restraint that has thus far left him free to clog the streets, disrupt traffic and commerce and interfere with other men's rights. Mob action invites mob action. Violence invites violence; lawlessness invites lawlessness."

The symbolism of Helms versus Gantt was thick as grits. The question in 1990 stared North Carolinians in the face: are we finally, once and for all, better than that? For most of the year, it looked like we were. Gantt, running on an energized grassroots, led in the polls right up to election day. Celebrations were in the works. A few days before the voting, a Gantt organizer called me up and cracked, "Does anybody have a copy of 'The Night They Drove Old Dixie Down'?"

But while we were busy planning victory parties, aglow with the thought of Jesse losing to a civil rights hero, Helms unleashed his infamous "white hands" ad: a close-up of a pair of white male hands opening, reading and then crumpling a rejection letter. "You needed that job and you were the best qualified," the narrator somberly intoned. "But they had to give it to a minority because of a racial quota. Is that really fair? Harvey Gantt says it is. Gantt supports Ted Kennedy's racial quota law that makes the color of your skin more important than your qualifications." Just like forty years earlier, the dark side prevailed. Gantt had come close, but his slight advantage in the final polls had disappeared by the time North Carolinians went to vote. We weren't there yet.

John McCain has done his darnedest to help Obama in North Carolina, running a campaign that has been alternately angry and absent. The news that the Democrat had drawn even in the state was apparently slow to register with them. Until a visit on October 13, the GOP nominee hadn't set foot in the state since June, when he huddled privately with the Rev. Billy Graham. McCain had talked to Tar Heel voters before the May primary, when he told a crowd at Wake Forest University that he appreciated "the hospitality of the students and faculty of West Virginia." Maybe that's why it took him so long to show his face again.

Right after the second debate in October, the McCain camp roused itself and sent Sarah Palin to East Carolina University in Greenville, the red heart of Jesse Helms's eastern North Caro-

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lina base. It was quite the Helmsian scene, starting with the invocation, when local pastor Walter Leake prayed: "We know the truth is out there, and the truth is that the other side is lying, unbelievably lying.… God, we ask you to close their mouths."

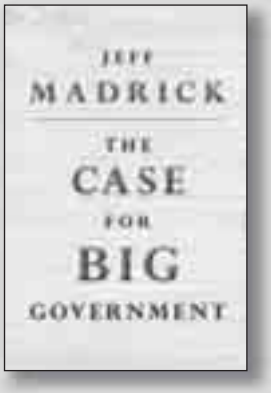
Then out came Helms's replacement senator, Elizabeth Dole, locked in the fight of her life (now uphill) against scrappy Democratic State Senator Kay Hagan, to carry on about how the outsider Democrats were ganging up on her. In her impossibly honeyed Hollywood drawl, Dole complained vociferously about a most terrible person called Senator Chuck Schumer, who had already poured some $5.5 million into ads attacking her for voting with Bush 92 percent of the time and coming in ninety-third in one Senate effectiveness ranking. (Two good ol' boys argue whether she's "92" or "93" in a devastating Democratic commercial, not so subtly playing on Dole's record and her age, which is 72.) "He's try-un to buy North Carolin-uh with his *New York* money, and we're naht goin' to let that happ-un," she instructed the folk. (It has been reported, coincidentally, that Dole's percentage of out-of-state contributors far exceeds Hagan's.) Loud boos were aimed at this Schumer character. The crowd later roused itself into a gleeful, guttural chant: "Nobama! Nobama! Nobama!"

The main speaker was not about to lighten the tone. "Here in North Carolina," said Sarah Palin, just getting warmed up, "you can help put us there in Washington, DC." That was about as positive, or specific, as she got. But she did have something to say. It was in Greenville where she first asked the immortal question, whether Obama really "didn't know that he had launched his political career in the living room of a terrorist?" The folks cheered themselves hoarse. And when the next set of polls came out, Obama had taken a slight lead in the state.

The GOP's attack strategy, its only strategy in North Carolina, hasn't—so far—paid dividends any more than Hillary Clinton's fervid populist effort last spring, in the primary that ended her nomination hopes numerically and realistically with a 56-to-42 drubbing. At the height of the hoo-ha about the Rev. Jeremiah Wright, Bill Clinton had been dispatched to some four dozen small-town arenas and community college auditoriums, talking to overwhelmingly white audiences and basically delivering the message: "You know, remember now, we're all right, we're one of you. Not like that other fellow." But Obama rode the metropolitan areas, where the swing votes and new votes reside, to a victory bigger than the polls had suggested.

The night of his primary triumph in May, Obama was all swole with joy and uplift—and in full sales mode. After calling North Carolina "a swing state, a state where we will compete to win if I am the…nominee for president," Obama raised the roof with his big preacherly finish: "In this country, justice can be won against the greatest odds. Hope can find its way back from the darkest corners.… We answer with one voice, 'Yes we can.' North Carolina and America…don't ever forget that this campaign is about you. It's about your hopes, it's about your dreams, it's about your struggles, it's about your aspirations."

There is something about North Carolina, both the old one and the new one, that has an ear for that kind of thing. And an ear, too, for the folksier and more focused (on economics) Obama of the general election. In early October he sounded just like a successful NC Democrat, speaking the language of sound, responsible, inarguable progress and duly noting the 24,000 manufacturing job losses in the state this year, part of an ava-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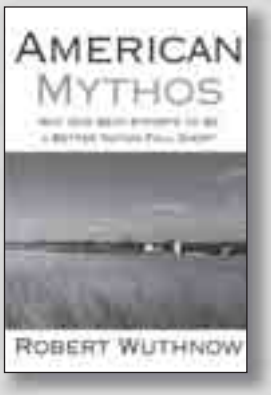


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lanche of layoffs with the collapse of textile, furniture and tobacco industries. And he snatched the high road—the one that always works best for North Carolina Democrats. "Senator McCain and his operatives are gambling that they can distract you with smears rather than talk to you about substance," he said, his body swaying more animatedly than usual. He looked loose here, at home. "They'd rather tear our campaign down than lift this country up. That's what you do when you're out of touch, out of ideas, and running out of time!" Cheers.

"I'm going to keep on talking about issues that matter…. I'm going to talk about healthcare. I'm going to talk about education. I'm going to talk about energy. I'm going to keep on standing up for hard-working families who aren't getting a fair shake in this economy." Whoops all around. "We're not going to let John McCain distract us. We're not going to let him hoodwink ya, or bamboozle ya"—here, Obama could not help chuckling at himself. "We're not going to let him run the okey-doke on ya. The American people are too smart for that, because they want to move this country forward."

It was pretty good talk. And it had nothing to do with guns, or NASCAR, or "life," or "faith," or any of the sorts of cultural shtick national Democrats have trotted out so uncomfortably in the South and Midwest. Here was Obama, crisply dressed in his usual white shirt and tie, harking back to Tar Heel politicians like Aycock and Sanford and four-time governor Jim Hunt, who appealed to people's common sense in order to advance progressivism. At the same time, he was also establishing himself as the torchbearer of a whole new brand of rational progressivism that appeals mightily to the new North Carolina.

But the Republican robocalls cranked up soon after Obama's visit. More disturbingly, Helms-style "white hands" made a comeback, courtesy of an RNC mailer that infected mailboxes across North Carolina in mid-October. The main image is a close-up of a big, weathered Caucasian hand resting on a chest decorated with an American flag pin. "It used to be easy to recognize patriotism," reads the main headline. The flier mostly criticizes Obama and Biden on taxes, but the racial implications are anything but subtle.

There is, surely, worse to come. Everybody in North Carolina knows that. What nobody will know, until November 4, is whether such tactics can still work their satanic charm in a state that's at the vanguard of a new, and increasingly blue, South. ■

# Protect This Election

## Bracing for a fight as Republicans try desperately to stanch the flow of new voters to the polls.

**by ANDREW GUMBEL**

Not so long ago, when Karl Rove was still dreaming of a permanent Republican majority based on his "50 percent plus one" model for fighting and winning elections, 2008 was shaping up as possibly the dirtiest election season yet.

The plan was straightforward: to use every legislative and executive lever available to the GOP to suppress the votes of minorities, students, the poor, the transient and the elderly; and to denounce any attempt by the other side to level the playing field as a monstrous exercise in systemic voter fraud.

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A lot of pieces of that plan are still in place and could still pose a threat to the integrity of the November 4 elections if any one of them—a crucial Senate race, say, if not also the race for the presidency—turns out to be remotely close.

Voter ID laws passed by GOP-majority legislatures in Georgia, Indiana and elsewhere serve as thinly veiled mechanisms for suppressing opposition voters, because those without driver's licenses or other forms of government-issued identity cards are more likely to be Democrats.

In several states, the Republican Party has made plans to challenge the legitimacy of thousands of voters, in some cases using a notorious, legally dubious technique known as "caging," whereby the party sends out nonforwardable mail to low-income or minority households (the people likely to move frequently or to be victims of subprime mortgage foreclosures) and uses returned envelopes to question the eligibility of the addressees.

Some Republican-run states, most notably Florida, have introduced absurdly strict standards for the admission of new voters to the rolls, making it likely that thousands, if not tens of thousands, of them will have to go to extraordinary lengths on election day to prove that they have the right to cast a ballot. History suggests many of these new voters will either give up when challenged or fail to show up at all.

Most serious, the Republicans have sought to use the Justice Department to legitimize these efforts and, in some cases, to extend them—by paying close attention to the (mostly nonexistent) problem of individual ballot fraud while showing little or no interest in protecting the rights of minority voters, as the Voting Rights Act mandates that the department do.

The GOP has been laying this groundwork over the past several election cycles—using each technique either as a means

*Andrew Gumbel, who has written extensively about voting rights issues, is the author of* Steal This Vote: Dirty Elections and the Rotten History of Democracy in America *(Nation Books).*

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Arthur T. Benjamin is Professor of Mathematics at Harvey Mudd College, where he has taught since 1989. He earned a Ph.D. in Mathematical Sciences from Johns Hopkins University. The Mathematical Association of America honored him with national awards for distinguished teachingin 1999 and 2000 and named him the George Pólya Lecturer for 2006–08.

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to squeak ahead in tight races or as a pretext for challenging results in the event of a narrow loss. We know, for example, that in 2004 the party investigated the eligibility of more than half a million voters across the country, challenged 74,000 of them directly on election day and had a plan in place to challenge tens of thousands more in such swing states as Nevada, New Mexico, Florida and Pennsylvania in the event that John Kerry came out ahead of George W. Bush in the race for the White House. (An e-mail trail setting out these plans was uncovered after the election by the PBS program *Now*.)

In 2008 the techniques for challenging voters this way—or for deterring or disenfranchising them in the first place—have become more widespread and sophisticated. Just look at the way the Republicans have demonized ACORN, the low-income advocacy group that works to register new minority voters.

In every election cycle since 2004, ACORN has been put through the wringer for supposedly aiding and abetting voter fraud—usually in ways designed to sway the public against the Democrats in the days before a key state vote. While ACORN has had well-advertised problems getting its low-wage workforce to produce reliable voter registration lists, those lists have not been shown to result in a single fraudulently cast ballot.

This year, that demonization has taken on vast new proportions, presumably connected to ACORN's claim to have registered 1.3 million new voters. The FBI has launched an investigation that smells, once again, of political interference in the electoral process by the Justice Department. Republican operatives have accused ACORN, absurdly, of perpetrating the subprime mortgage lending crisis [see Peter Dreier and John Atlas, "The GOP's Blame-ACORN Game," page 20] and of being a "quasi-criminal organization"—hinting darkly that ACORN-registered voters may not be eligible. One think tank that sees its mission as bashing ACORN on behalf of its big-business backers, the Employment Policies Institute, even calls it "a multi-million-dollar, multinational conglomerate."

## Vote Suppression Watch

**Michigan.** The Republican Party chair in Macomb County, in the northern Detroit suburbs, told the *Michigan Messenger* in early September that he was planning a vote-caging operation aimed at the former owners of foreclosed homes—a group more or less guaranteed to generate a large quantity of returned mail and thus potential challenges. A storm of outrage ensued, and within a week the chair was denying he had launched such an initiative and claiming that he was misquoted.

**Montana.** The executive director of the state Republican Party tried to have 6,000 voters in Democratic-leaning counties removed from the rolls on the grounds that they had changed their mailing addresses—at least according to an out-of-state vendor who sells change-of-address information for profit. The attempted purge was riddled with problems, not least the fact that many of those changing addresses were military personnel shipping out to Iraq and Afghanistan. The party has now dropped the initiative.

**Wisconsin.** Wisconsin's attorney general, J.B. Van Hollen, who also happens to be co-chair of the state McCain election campaign, has sued the nonpartisan election board to try to force a review of all voter registrations received since January 2006 to make sure they tally with state records. The move, which has yet to be resolved in court, has been widely denounced as a partisan maneuver sure to interfere with the voting rights of as many as 1 million people.

**Nevada.** Nevada's attorney general and secretary of state—both Democrats—ordered a raid on ACORN's Las Vegas headquarters after reports surfaced that registration forms gathered by the group included the starting lineup of the Dallas Cowboys. ACORN points out, correctly, that it had already alerted the authorities to questionable registration forms (which it cannot, by law, destroy) and suspects the raid is a vote suppression operation. More likely, though, the authorities were under huge pressure from Nevada Republicans to crack down on "voter fraud" and saw this as an occasion to show themselves to be evenhanded and thus prevent a backlash against Democrats on election day.

The strange thing about this and the rest of the GOP attack machine is that somewhere along the way, the wheels started coming off. This is partly a result of straightforward political warfare: the groundwork laid by GOP operatives may be more extensive than in the past, but so are the campaigns to denounce their efforts, from the likes of Common Cause, the Century Foundation, the Brennan Center for Justice and other organizations that have issued report after report exposing the dirt and incompetence in the electoral system and calling the Republicans' bluff on the supposed scourge of individual voter fraud. It certainly helps that the denunciations are now coming from well-known groups with serious academic credentials and a commitment to accurate research—a welcome change from the days when hardworking but underqualified Internet campaigners were breathlessly denouncing nonexistent political plots cooked up by the Republicans and the makers of touch-screen voting machines.

The change of mood is also a reflection of broader political realities. Barack Obama is ahead in the polls, the public is of a mind to view Republican maneuvering of all kinds in a less than favorable light and attempts to deter or suppress Democratic voters are up against the remarkable surge in enthusiasm and voter registration behind the Obama ticket. The Republicans were reported to be thinking about mounting a vote-caging operation against the former owners of foreclosed homes in one Michigan county, only to deny any such intent when the plan became public. In Montana, an attempt to disenfranchise 6,000 people in Democratic-leaning districts has sparked similar outrage. Dirty electioneering, in other words, may boost a party headed toward a narrow victory, as it did for the Republicans in 2004, but it can sink a floundering party like a stone. Voters can smell the desperation, and they don't like it.

The Republicans also made the mistake, as they have in so many policy areas, of overreaching and alienating even their own supporters. The US Attorneys scandal was probably the starkest example, especially since at least two if not more of the

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fired federal prosecutors were given the boot for their failure to pursue individual voter fraud. David Iglesias, the New Mexico prosecutor at the eye of the storm, described in his memoir *In Justice* earlier this year how the White House first went after Todd Graves in Missouri, to see if there would be a backlash, and became emboldened when they didn't detect much of a reaction. Another eight fired Attorneys later, the new Democratic majority in Congress was alarmed enough to start investigating—and expose the Bush administration's gross political manipulations. Iglesias, interestingly, was a staunch Republican but refused to file unsubstantiated voter fraud charges when he knew any half-serious judge would throw them straight out.

More Republicans standing on principle have surfaced in the heat of the McCain-Obama battle. In October, Montana Lieutenant Governor John Bohlinger declared publicly he was "appalled at the leadership of my political party" for vote suppression activities that have "no place in a democracy."

It would be a mistake, though, to count on other John Bohlingers coming forward to denounce every piece of skulduggery. In fact, for those with a mind to be alarmed, 2008 is already sounding several warning bells. Republicans in at least three states—Ohio, Florida and Wisconsin—have sued the electoral authorities to try to expand their power to challenge voters. (The Supreme Court thwarted those efforts in Ohio, but the other cases are still open.) In plenty of others they have telegraphed their intention to go after voter eligibility among certain choice demographic groups—students in Virginia, for example. Several swing states have tried to pass laws specifically outlawing caging and other vote-challenging techniques, but none, in the past couple of years, have successfully pushed them through their state legislatures and onto the desks of their governors.

Usually, vote suppression efforts come to light only in the last couple of weeks before election day. This time, though, the reports of foul play, or attempted foul play, started to pour in unnervingly early. "It's exhausting from this end," says one of the country's leading voter protection activists, Jonah Goldman of the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law. "Every day we get another three or four things we need to investigate. From a political perspective, the campaigns understand the mechanisms of elections a lot better than they ever did before. At the same time, we have by far the most robust and sophisticated voter protection program we've ever had. We've matured very far, on both sides of the issue."

Goldman is no apologist for the Democrats. On the contrary, he sees plenty of flaws to go around in the two-party system and in this country's massively devolved, loophole-ridden electoral system. The only reason the Democrats aren't causing more trouble of their own this season, he feels, is that they aren't as scared of losing. That said, voter suppression is typically a Republican tactic, going back decades. (Democrats, when they cheat, prefer to pad the rolls with supporters rather than purge them of their adversaries.)

Some of the possible vote suppression stems as much from organizational chaos as from ill will. This year, several states have struggled with a federal mandate to streamline their voter databases, leading to wide concern that eligible voters are being purged. The *New York Times* has found that tens of thousands of names were being struck from lists or blocked from registering in six swing states—Colorado, Indiana, Ohio, Michigan, Nevada and North Carolina—in apparent violation of federal law. In three states—Louisiana, Michigan and Colorado—the number of people who have died or moved out of state is far exceeded by the number of names taken off the voting rolls.

In a report on voter purges published earlier this year, the Brennan Center denounced a process it said was often "shrouded in secrecy, prone to error, and vulnerable to manipulation." Sometimes a highly technocratic point, like Florida's insistence that every voter registration form should provide an exact match of the name on existing state records, can have profound political ramifications. If a lot of people are going to get disqualified, it is probably the wealthier, more comfortable voters who will have time to present the proper paperwork and get themselves reinstated on election day. More transient voters, or voters with inflexible low-wage jobs, are likelier to give up once they have been told they can vote by provisional ballot only.

We can expect similar chaos with the allocation of voting machines, especially in new battleground states like Virginia and North Carolina, where the turnout for the presidential election is likely to break records. The voter registration problem and the machine allocation problem can be related, since new registrations are often a guide to likely turnout on election day. Since Virginia has a backlog on processing its registration forms, its chances of finding enough machines to satisfy demand look even dimmer. "Virginia is not preparing well," Goldman said.

To the extent that the problems affect minority voters, one might expect some sort of oversight or intervention by the Justice Department. Under the Bush administration, of course,

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the department has taken the opposite tack—rushing to find individual voter fraud where it doesn't exist but filing no voter intimidation suits under Section 11(b) of the Voting Rights Act, except for one case in Mississippi where the aggrieved minority just happened to be whites. There's still a chance the department will clean up its act—for example, it could choose to deploy teams of lawyers to problem areas in the South, as opposed to sending staffers, as it did in 2004, to keep an eye on crucial battleground states like Ohio. Typically, the Justice Department doesn't announce its observation plans until two or three days before the election. "We'll have to wait and see whether there has been an improvement or not," says a cautious Kristen Clarke of the NAACP Legal Defense Fund. We probably shouldn't hold our breath.

In the end, even the most insidious vote suppression technique makes just a marginal difference—one half-percentage point here, another there—and comes seriously into play only in a close race. Such tactics can't prevent an Obama landslide, if that is what we are about to see, or overturn a two- to three-point victory in any given state. Anyone who cares about fair elections, though, should be looking beyond just this presidential election. The Republicans who have dreamed up these techniques are thinking long-term strategy over many cycles, not just short-term advantage. The day may also come when Democrats are tempted to play dirty in their own ways—although they have never attempted anything on a national scale as Republicans have. It will take many years of work to repair America's tattered voting system. Keeping a close eye and exposing as much of the dirt as possible in this election, though, is a good place to start. ■

# The GOP's Blame-ACORN Game

Scapegoating a respected community advocacy group for Wall Street's lending spree.

**by PETER DREIER AND JOHN ATLAS**

An increasingly desperate Republican attack machine has recently identified the community organizing group ACORN as Public Enemy Number One. Among ACORN's alleged crimes, perhaps the most serious is that it caused, nearly single-handedly, the world's financial crisis. That's the fantasy. In the reality-based world, it was ACORN that sounded the alarm about the exploitative lending practices that led to the current mortgage meltdown and financial crisis.

CHRISTOPHER SERRA

Since the 1970s ACORN, which has 400,000 low- and moderate-income "member families" in more than 100 cities in forty states, has been warning Congress to protect borrowers from the banking industry's irresponsible, risky and predatory practices—subprime loans, racial discrimination (called "redlining") and rip-off fees. ACORN has persistently called for stronger regulations on banks, private mortgage companies, mortgage brokers and rating agencies. For years, ACORN has alerted public officials that the industry was hoodwinking many families into taking out risky loans they couldn't afford and whose fine print they couldn't understand.

Now John McCain and his fellow conservatives are accusing ACORN of strong-arming Congress and big Wall Street banks into making subprime loans to poor families who couldn't afford them, thus causing the economic disaster. McCain's campaign is running a one-and-a-half-minute video that claims Barack Obama once worked for ACORN, repeats the accusation that ACORN is responsible for widespread voter registration fraud and accuses ACORN of "bullying banks, intimidation tactics, and disruption of business." The ad claims that ACORN "forced banks to issue risky home loans—the same types of loans that caused the financial crisis we're in today."

For months, the right-wing echo chamber—bloggers, columnists, editorial writers and TV and radio talk-show hosts—has pitched in with a well-orchestrated campaign to blame the mortgage crisis on ACORN and the Community Reinvestment Act (CRA), the 1977 anti-redlining law. In a September 27 editorial, the *Wall Street Journal* wrote that "ACORN has promoted laws like the Community Reinvestment Act, which laid the foundation for the house of cards built out of subprime loans" and then falsely claimed the bailout bill would create a trust fund "pipeline" to fill ACORN's coffers. On October 14 the *Journal*'s lead editorial, OBAMA AND ACORN, described ACORN as a "shady outfit" and accused the group of being "a major contributor to the subprime meltdown by pushing lenders to make home loans on easy terms, conducting 'strikes' against banks so they'd lower credit standards."

Discussing the mortgage crisis on his Fox News show, *Your World*, Neil Cavuto commented, "Loaning to minorities and risky folks is a disaster."

Over at the *Washington Post*, columnist Charles Kraut-

*Peter Dreier, who teaches politics and directs the Urban & Environmental Policy program at Occidental College, is co-author of* The Next Los Angeles: The Struggle for a Livable City *and* Place Matters: Metropolitics for the 21st Century. *John Atlas, president of the New Jersey–based National Housing Institute—a nonprofit think tank that publishes* Shelterforce *magazine—is writing a book,* Seeds of Hope, *about democracy, community organizing, poverty and the work of ACORN.*

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hammer complained that the CRA had led banks and other lenders "to extend mortgages to people who were borrowing over their heads." Holding forth on *The O'Reilly Factor*, Laura Ingraham laid the foreclosure problem on Bill Clinton, who "pushed all these institutions to lend to minority communities." Many of the loans, she said, were "very risky." Former Arkansas Governor Mike Huckabee, a putative populist, echoed on the *Hannity & Colmes Show*: "The truth is that Democrats controlled the ability to fix this [the mortgage crisis]. It was their harsh regulation under the Community Reinvestment Act that started this ball rolling down the hill. "

On September 10 on *Fox & Friends*, *National Review* columnist Stanley Kurtz described ACORN as "a group of community organizers [who] specialize in putting pressure, really kind of intimidation tactics, on banks, to get these banks to make high-risk loans to low-credit customers.... They even show up at the homes of bank officials to scare them and their families. They send demonstrators into the lobbies of banks, all to get the banks to make these high-risk loans to people with low credit." McCain's anti-ACORN attack video is almost a word-for-word duplication of Kurtz's comments.

The right-wing case against the CRA is entirely bogus—a diversionary tactic to take the heat off the financial services industry and its allies, like McCain. The CRA applies only to depository institutions, like commercial and savings banks, but thanks to Congress's deregulation mania, there are now many other lenders, including private mortgage companies like CitiMortgage, Household Finance and Countrywide Financial (which was recently bought out by Bank of America). These outfits, which exist in a shadow world without government oversight, account for most of the predatory loans in trouble today.

When Congress enacted the CRA in 1977, the vast majority of all mortgage loans were made by lenders regulated by the law. In 2006 only about 43 percent of home loans were made by companies subject to the CRA. Indeed, the main culprits in the subprime scandal—the nonbank mortgage companies, which successfully grabbed the bulk of the mortgage market away from the CRA-regulated banking industry—were not covered by the CRA.

Wall Street investment firms—including Lehman Brothers, Goldman Sachs, Bear Stearns and Citigroup—set up special units, provided mortgage companies with lines of credit, then purchased the subprime mortgages from the lenders, bundled them into "mortgage-backed securities" and sold them for a fat fee to wealthy investors worldwide, typically without scrutiny. By 2007 the subprime business had become a $1.5 trillion global market for investors seeking high returns. Because lenders didn't have to keep the loans on their books, they didn't worry about the risk of losses.

Congress passed the CRA after many studies, using the banks' lending data, had documented widespread racial discrimination in mortgage lending. The CRA encourages federally chartered banks to examine the credit needs of the communities they serve and to lend based on these needs—for small businesses, homes and other types of loans. It does not require banks to make loans to businesses or people who can't repay them. It does not ask banks to engage in charity. It simply tells banks: don't discriminate against qualified borrowers.

At first, many banks were reluctant to make loans to minority borrowers seeking to fix up their homes, buy new ones or start new businesses in urban neighborhoods. In the late 1970s and early '80s, community organizing groups like ACORN, National People's Action and others pushed banks and federal regulators to remove their racial blinders. Once they did so, banks discovered that many working- and middle-class black and Latino borrowers were excellent customers with good credit histories. These new markets generated good profits on stable loans with little risk.

The explosion of subprime mortgages was touched off in the early twenty-first century, as the number of lenders regulated by the government and covered by the CRA dramatically dwindled. In 2002 subprime loans made up 8 percent of all mortgages; by 2006 they had soared to 20 percent. Since 2004 more than 90 percent of subprime mortgages have come with exploding adjustable rates.

Not surprisingly, the foreclosure rates on subprime, adjustable-rate and other exotic mortgage loans have run four to five times higher than the foreclosure rates on conventional CRA mortgages. Testifying before the House Financial Services Committee in February, University of Michigan law professor Michael Barr reported that only about 20 percent of subprime mortgages were issued by banks regulated by the CRA. The other 80 percent of predatory and high-interest subprime loans were offered by financial institutions not covered by the CRA and not subject to routine examination or supervision. "The worst and most widespread abuses occurred in the institutions with the least federal oversight," Barr told Congress.

In contrast, the CRA actually penalizes banks for reckless, irresponsible or otherwise predatory lending. According to Ellen Seidman, director of the Treasury Department's Office of Thrift Supervision from 1997 to 2001, federal regulators warned CRA-covered institutions that "badly underwritten subprime products that ignored consumer protections were not acceptable." Lenders not subject to CRA did not receive similar warnings.

And unlike the institutions that offer unregulated predatory subprime loans, banks that make CRA loans are required by federal regulation to verify borrowers' incomes to make sure they can afford the mortgages. In 2006 the Federal Reserve reported that just 11.5 percent of mortgages made by CRA-regulated institutions were high-cost loans, compared with 33.5 percent for lenders not covered by the CRA. Janet Yellen, president and CEO of the Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco, has criticized those who blame CRA lending for the subprime crisis: "Most of the loans made by depository institutions examined under the CRA have not been higher-priced loans, and studies have shown that the CRA has increased the volume of responsible lending to low- and moderate-income households."

While the CRA helped boost the nation's homeownership rate, particularly among black and Latino borrowers, subprime and other exotic mortgages had very little impact on homeownership. Most subprime loans were refinances of existing mortgages. From 1998 through 2005, more than half of all subprime mortgages were for refinancing, while less than 10 percent of subprime loans went to first-time home buyers. Moreover, a significant number of borrowers who took out

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subprime loans could have qualified for conventional, prime-rate mortgages with much better terms. Even the *Wall Street Journal* acknowledges that "plenty of people with seemingly good credit are also caught in the subprime trap." Brokers and lenders misled many of these homeowners, replacing safe thirty-year fixed-rate mortgages with deceptive, risky loans.

The CRA gave federal regulators the power to deny approval for lucrative bank mergers or acquisitions if the companies engaged in persistently irresponsible or discriminatory lending. Under Reagan and George W. Bush, regulators failed to enforce the law, so activist groups like ACORN used the CRA to hold banks accountable. They conducted their own studies, uncovered banks with a pattern of irresponsible lending, exposed these practices to the media and demanded that regulators do their job. To avoid costly and harmful confrontations, many lenders forged "community reinvestment agreements" with ACORN and other community groups, pledging to make loans to borrowers who could afford them and whose neighborhood banks had ignored them. According to a study by the Harvard Joint Center for Housing Studies, the CRA helped catalyze more than $1 trillion in bank lending.

ACORN and its allies, including the Center for Responsible Lending, the Greenlining Institute, the Center for Community Change and the National Community Reinvestment Coalition, carried on the battle against abusive lenders on many fronts to ensure that loans in minority areas did not put borrowers in risky situations. ACORN's homeownership counseling program for prospective borrowers was successful in helping families avoid taking out loans they could not afford. In 2006 the foreclosure rate of loans to borrowers who went through ACORN's homeowner counseling program stood at .032 percent.

ACORN and other consumer groups fought for rules requiring lenders to document that borrowers had the ability to repay. They warned that adjustable-rate mortgages—those that started with a low "teaser" rate, which would adjust to a much higher rate later—were a ticking time bomb and that such loans should be made only to people who were able to afford the regular rates after the teasers had run out. But the lenders and the securitizers (Wall Street firms that packaged loans into mortgage-backed securities and sold them)—and too often the regulators and the lawmakers—didn't heed the warnings. The industry convinced its political cronies that government regulation was too costly and cumbersome.

ACORN and its allies opposed banks whose fees and other charges inflated the cost of loans while padding their profits from transactions and diminishing the long-term safety of these loans. These groups denounced compensation systems that rewarded lenders and brokers for putting borrowers in higher-cost loans regardless of their credit-worthiness. They exposed the outrageous practice called "yield spread premium." This is a kickback from lenders to brokers for selling loans that are more expensive than what borrowers qualify for. It is essentially a bonus for cheating the borrower and upping the risk of default. Earlier this year, after a long battle by the Center for Responsible Lending, the first state—North Carolina—made this practice illegal.

ACORN joined other consumer advocates and lawyers to promote the notion of "assignee liability"—arguing that companies that buy, and profit from, loans bear responsibility for illegal acts committed when those loans were originally made. Without it, the mortgage originators, who typically hold loans briefly before they sell them, can make fraudulent or risky loans without suffering any consequences. Again and again, Wall Street argued that it was too burdensome to scrutinize the loans they were buying or to be held responsible for the original transactions.

Several of ACORN's battles were notably successful. It got some major lenders to reduce the outrageously high interest rates and fees they charged borrowers. For example, in 2001 ACORN persuaded Household Finance Corporation to abolish its practice of selling bogus credit insurance that had been costing a billion dollars a year straight out of homeowners' pockets. ACORN's activism spurred state attorneys general to sue Household Finance in 2002, forcing the firm to distribute a record $484 million to abused borrowers. In a separate suit against Household Finance, ACORN won a $150 million settlement that it put partly into a foreclosure prevention fund.

But ACORN and its counterparts have only been able to stick their fingers in the crumbling dike of American finance. Their warnings were prescient, but their victories were too small, their opponents too strong. So it is richly ironic that John McCain—a longtime ally of the banking industry whose mentor Phil Gramm orchestrated the 1999 Financial Modernization Act, opening the floodgates to irresponsible lending practices—is trying to scapegoat ACORN for the subprime crisis. Powerful business groups and their right-wing allies will continue to attack ACORN because it exposed and battled the real culprits of the financial crisis. ■

# Letters

*(continued from page 2)*

stock market in a state-approved 401(k) plan. A long-retired distinguished service professor emeritus in a discipline far removed from economics, I know nothing about the economy. So as I watch the plunging stock market, I can't help feeling in my ignorance as if I'm being thrown to the rapacious wolves named by your contributors.

Keith Elkins

## Lipstick on a Shrub

Parkton, Md.

If ever a picture was worth a thousand words, it is the one on page 11 of your October 13 issue, by Gene Case and Stephen Kling of Avenging Angels. It illustrates Michelle Goldberg's "Palin's Party" and is a wonderful parody of how the party of lies, spin, con jobs and sanctimoniousness sees itself. When will America realize that Sarah Palin is just Bush with earrings?

M.V. Runkles III

## Clarification

In Andrew Gumbel's "Justice, Bush-Style" [Oct. 20], Joshua Rogers was identified as "a Republican appointee placed in a career position" at Justice. Although he *was* hired because of his GOP affiliations, he is a career attorney in the civil rights division, and not an appointee.

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# Books & the Arts.

## Walk With Me

**by MARINA HARSS**

It is the end of Jerome Robbins's *Dances at a Gathering*. For an hour, the audience has sat in the dark and watched ten dancers, never more than a few at a time and sometimes only one, run, sway, walk, flirt, turn, raise their legs in airy arabesques and jump. As the pianist begins to play the extraordinarily limpid opening measures of Chopin's Nocturne in F major (Op. 15 No. 1), the dancers stroll out of the wings one at a time, each at his or her own pace and in no particular order, promenading calmly as if taking the warm evening air. A man in brown crouches down and slowly, deliberately touches the stage with the palm of his hand as the others watch.

The mystery and potency of the gesture is surprising. The unhurried, wistful, sometimes playful performance that preceded it, sustained by familiar Chopin mazurkas, waltzes and études played simply, without virtuosic flash, by an offstage pianist, has suddenly acquired a different hue. The music darkens and quickens, as if a cold wind were blowing; turbulent arpeggios, now in a minor key, rumble up from the lower register of the piano. The dancers stop in their tracks and tilt their heads upward, their eyes following something beyond our heads in an unseen sky; a shadow darkens their faces as their heads swivel slowly to watch it pass; then the music resolves into a major key, and it's gone. The dancers form a circle and bow to one another, then walk away from the audience arm in arm. What is it they've seen, what is the secret they've taken with them, I wonder as I stumble out into the lights of Lincoln Center.

It's an illusion, of course, but a potent one. There is no cloud or looming danger, except in the minor tonality of the music; these people are complete strangers to us, possibly half or one third our age, and neither we nor they live in an idealized, faintly Eastern European world drenched with nostalgia. Each of these seemingly emotion-filled movements has been carefully choreographed and drilled into their minds and bodies. Yet the feelings the ballet has brought up are vivid, and they are not only the kind provoked by watching beautiful bodies moving in space with a grace and precision unattainable to the rest of us. And it seems that, at least for some dancers, at least some of the time, the emotion felt by the audience mirrors, to some extent, their own. British choreographer and former dancer Christopher Wheeldon, who joined the New York City Ballet in 1993, remembers the feeling of dancing the boy in brick (the roles in *Dances at a Gathering* are identified by the color of their costumes) in this way: "Often last on the program…the wings would be empty, all the other dancers having gone home. The theatre felt like ours, even the audience disappeared. There we were, a group of friends and lovers all coming back to the same place we had all known together at one time. There was a very special, almost magical atmosphere between us." He adds, suggestively, "I have always resisted watching a performance of it because I know it will never look how it feels." And yet, somehow, it does.

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*West Side Story Suite* at the New York City Ballet, 2008

Jerome Robbins died ten years ago. This year in New York City, his home base for most of his life, there have been several events to mark this milestone. During the spring the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts hosted a large and informative exhibit about his life and work, curated by dance historian Lynn Garafola. Across Lincoln Plaza, the New York City Ballet went even further in exploring the Robbins repertory. Robbins's association with City Ballet lasted five decades, and his mark on the company's repertory and dancers has been profound; it made sense for the company to devote most of its spring season to ten programs of Robbins ballets—thirty-three in all—spanning his entire career, from *Fancy Free* (1944) to *Brandenburg*, which he made the year before he died. With the opportunity to see the great range of Robbins's work, one was left with a sense of his style, his search for an American form of ballet that somehow expressed the qualities he demanded from his dancers: simplicity, lack of guile, directness and, most of all, a real ability to communicate emotion that went beyond virtuosity or staginess.

In *Dances at a Gathering*, as in many of his ballets, Robbins was able to make something as public, contrived, anachronistic and unspontaneous as a classical ballet set to nineteenth-century sentimental Parisian parlor music—with a strong whiff of Polish pastoralism—feel immediate, intimate, almost improvised and deeply touching, both to the people onstage and to those in the velvet seats. How did he do it? The answer, at least in part, is that despite the fact that there is no story line or set—*Dances at a Gathering* is performed on a bare stage, with only a sky-blue backdrop, stylized "peasant" costumes and balmy lighting to suggest a sense of time or place—the ballet seems to be about something, as elusive as that something is. The intensity of feeling invoked by this and other Robbins works does not really emerge from the steps them-

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*Marina Harss is a translator and dance writer in New York City. Recent translations include Elizabeth Subercaseaux's* A Week in October, *Alberto Moravia's* Conjugal Love *and Pier Paolo Pasolini's* Stories From the City of God.

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selves, or even from the relation of the steps to the music, or at least not from these alone. Even the idea of "a group of friends and lovers coming back to the same place we had all known together at one time," as Wheeldon describes it, is not a dance idea but a theatrical one. Though Robbins slyly argued that the ballet, which premiered in 1969, had no story, and that "the dancers are themselves dancing with each other to that music in that space" (which sounds very much like a Balanchinean idea), this is not how he spoke of the piece with the dancers as he methodically coached them in their roles. (Robbins was not one to leave interpretations to chance.) As Lourdes López, a former dancer with the New York City Ballet, told me, "With Jerry it was theater, and there was a story even if there wasn't a story. You had to have that; it was your responsibility."

**The transformation of everyday movement into precise dance steps is a key Robbins device.**

Robbins, who was born Jerome Wilson Rabinowitz in Manhattan in 1918, was an intensely theatrical choreographer and, perhaps more than that, a true man of the theater. He grew up in Weehawken, New Jersey, and took up ballet in his late teens after performing in musical theater, both at Tamiment, a Jewish resort in the Poconos, and on and off Broadway. At Ballet Theatre (the precursor of American Ballet Theatre), which he joined in 1940, he excelled in dramatic roles that required an actor's imagination, such as the lead in Michel Fokine's *Petrouchka*, and became a follower of British choreographer Antony Tudor, who created ballets that drew on emotional (some would say psychological) traumas and repressions, such as the loss of a child (*Dark Elegies*), sexual longing (*Pillar of Fire*) and the weight of conforming to social expectations (*Lilac Garden*). In fact, it was *Dark Elegies* that drew Robbins to ballet in the first place, and it was perhaps in Tudor's studio that he acquired a taste for difficult rehearsals—both men were famously demanding, and sometimes cruel, taskmasters.

Even after he began making works for Ballet Theatre and, in 1948, joined City Ballet, and for another two decades after that, Robbins didn't abandon musical theater entirely; he shuttled back and forth, fruitfully though not painlessly, between ballet and Broadway, both of which he took completely seriously. Though Balanchine too had dabbled in Broadway and movie musicals in the late 1930s and '40s, such mobility between the two worlds was not typical, especially as ballet became more established in the United States. Robbins's achievements in musical theater are huge and self-evident, even if one is not a lover of the genre: his first show, with Leonard Bernstein, was *On the Town* (1944); it was based on *Fancy Free*, Robbins's first ballet, and remains a hit to this day. Robbins also made the dances—including the brilliant, self-contained musical-within-a-musical *The Small House of Uncle Thomas*—for *The King and I* (1951), which he re-created for the film version. He adapted, directed and choreographed *Peter Pan* (1954) and conceived, directed and choreographed the Broadway production of *West Side Story* (1957)—and co-directed the film. He directed and made the dances for *Gypsy* (1959)—a show that includes the classic "You Gotta Have a Gimmick" routine for three washed-up striptease "artistes," a number that makes an open-and-shut case for the notion of "less is more." Robbins's Broadway trajectory culminated in 1964 with *Fiddler on the Roof* (based on the stories of Sholem Aleichem), his most personal and emotionally charged—and undoubtedly his most sentimental—Broadway musical, which he directed and choreographed. Pauline Kael wrote of the film version (which, though not directed by Robbins, strongly bears his imprint), "It seems to me the most *powerful* movie musical ever made."

Robbins's great strength in musical theater was his ability to turn song-and-dance "numbers" into an integral part of a musical's action and the development of plot and character. Consider the opening sequence of the film *West Side Story* (1961), the making of which Robbins was intimately, obsessively involved with. As it begins, the camera pans over the island of Manhattan, a bridge, city neighborhoods, up Broadway (the sound of snapping fingers begins) and down to a ball court and a clump of semi-tough-looking boys wearing T-shirts, scruffy jeans and sneakers. They are sitting, crouching, leaning against a fence, snapping their fingers, gazing aggressively into space with deadpan eyes. One of them peels off from the group, casually shrugs one shoulder and begins to walk as the others follow in a clump. With the camera focused on their shoes, they trace a neat semicircle around a little girl playing on the blacktop, who follows them with her gaze. Now they're walking down a street, camera at shoulder height; all at once, but seemingly spontaneously, they turn and look back, then complete the turn and walk on. Without losing a beat, one guy does a little semicircle toward us, his foot lifted a few inches off the ground halfway between flexed and pointed, arms fanning outward. Now another guy does it, now two at once, and as the guys make a ninety-degree rotation and cross the street and the music subtly begins to crescendo, the guys do a gliding step in tandem, and these isolated gestures and "moves" begin to create a sense of order, a pattern. Suddenly this blob is an ensemble, with one guy clearly out in front, a soloist—Riff, the leader of the Jets. They all jump straight up with their arms jabbing into the air, fingers reaching; the brass kicks in with that famous Bernstein melody, and then there's the big spread-eagle kick to the side, the one with the arms sticking straight out and hands open, the Robbins kick that comes back again and again, not just in the musicals but also in the ballets. Suddenly, this is *dancing*.

It's a favorite device of Robbins's, this artful progression from everyday movement (usually walking) to casually but precisely executed dance steps, all done without alerting the audience that we should sit up and take notice. In a way, it's just like the beginning of *Dances at a Gathering*, which was produced twelve years after *West Side Story* premiered on Broadway and, with its aura of European nostalgia, seems to exist in a wholly different universe from Doc's Candy Store and Madame Lucia's Bridal Shop. A young man in brown walks out of the wings with his back to the audience, pensively. He takes a few steps away from us (unusual in the highly presentational world of ballet) and then places his left hand on his hip. He turns to the right hesitantly, as if "marking," or practicing, the step; then, with greater confidence, he does a more full-bodied, lilting turn to the left, then stops with his arms out, as if to say, "Hold on a minute." This leads to a series of clearly recognizable ballet steps (pirouettes, jumps, juicy arm movements) punctuated with little pauses and culminating in a big and fast full circle of soaring jumps. On a high, ringing note on the piano, the man in brown again stops with his hands out, followed by a pregnant pause, after which he turns around and walks off, touching his forehead as if to say, "Yes, I remember." In Robbins, the steps, the musicality and the

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gestural language that accompanies them—abstract or concrete as it may be—are connected to an idea, an emotional feeling, a mood that is more or less comprehensible to the audience. Or, as Joan Acocella wrote a few years ago in *The New Yorker*, "In Balanchine, dance is metaphor; in Robbins, it is still representation."

It is indeed easier to "get" a Robbins ballet than a completely abstract work like Balanchine's *Symphony in C*, *The Four Temperaments* or *Jewels*. (Comparisons between the two men are inevitable, since they worked side by side at City Ballet for more than three decades.) Many of Robbins's ballets, especially the earlier ones, have actual stories or at least situations they mean to illuminate in some way: three sailors on shore leave (*Fancy Free*), a colony of female insects who mate and kill (*The Cage*), the intimacy and narcissism of dancers in the ballet studio (*Afternoon of a Faun*), teenagers messing around (*N.Y. Export: Opus Jazz*). The later ballets—the ones Robbins made after his thirteen-year hiatus from City Ballet, during which he pursued Broadway projects, started his own touring dance company and explored experimental theater—are, like *Dances at a Gathering*, less story driven; but at heart they still contain a fundamental idea or, like the sprawling *Goldberg Variations* and the playful *Four Seasons*, explore a variety of vignettes, moods, themes and situations.

© PAUL KOLNIK/NEW YORK CITY BALLET

*Dances at a Gathering*, New York City Ballet, 2008

A contemporary ballet choreographer who also seems to work in this latter vein is Alexei Ratmansky, who has made two excellent and—an anomaly in the partisan world of dance—almost unanimously admired works for City Ballet in the past two years, the second one, *Concerto DSCH*, just this past season (the other is *Russian Seasons*, from 2006). These are among the most exciting works the company, and indeed the ballet world, has seen in years. Ratmansky seems to share Robbins's interest in illustrating and playing with miniature narratives and vignettes, albeit in a more fragmented way, and with a wink or two at the audience. In *Russian Seasons*, the dancers suggest rituals of a lost (or invented) Russian rural life driven by the seasons of life and work: games, friendships, courtships, the harvest, religion, marriage, death. *Concerto DSCH* evokes sport, collegial rivalry and a kind of joyously post-Soviet community, as well as the ache of lovers separated by circumstance. In both works, dancers watch one another, pretend to take breaks and fool around onstage, as if not taking the proceedings quite seriously. "This is only a ballet!" they seem to say. Ratmansky, who was trained in Russia and danced in Western Europe before returning to become artistic director of the Bolshoi (at only 35), is a postmodern ballet sophisticate in a way that Robbins could not be. (In January, Ratmansky will begin a five-year stint as artist in residence at the American Ballet Theatre.) Robbins brought the earnestness of musical theater to ballet, though; as in his Broadway work, he could be extremely funny.

A Robbins ballet has a certain affect and atmosphere: the studied spontaneity, the relaxed classicism, the concealment of technique combined with a casual virtuosity, the focus on interactions among dancers (rather than with the audience), the transitions from walking to dancing and back again. There are moments in Robbins's ballets—variations nine and twelve of *Goldberg Variations*, the beginning of *Glass Pieces* and the final section of the pas de deux in "Spring" from *Four Seasons*, for example—when the dancers do little more than walk. Walking is the connective tissue of his ballets, the basic movement language from which the dance steps emerge. As Jenifer Ringer, a dancer at City Ballet who is especially attuned to Robbins's style (she is wonderful as the second girl in *Fancy Free*), explained to me, "You can always tell when someone is comfortable in the Robbins rep when they're able to just walk across the stage and look natural but like a ballet dancer. He used to make us walk for hours.... There's a way to do it.... It's more, you roll through your foot." As in *West Side Story* and *Dances at a Gathering*, walking is the device that carries you into the work and into the world Robbins is creating onstage. Every so often, the dancing gives way to walking once again, to remind you that dancing is essentially a form of walking and that the creatures onstage are also people, that the illusion is also a reality. The walking helps to "see" the music, without the mediating factor of ballet technique. It is also a sign of Robbins's theatrical intelligence that he knows that the eye sometimes needs a rest, that too much dancing is as deadening as too little.

Another constant in Robbins's ballets is the act of watching, in all its permutations: observing, glancing, gazing. Ringer remembers that when Robbins was rehearsing a pas de deux, he would tell her partner to "look at her, look at her, look at her," stressing the connection between the two dancers. This gives his pas de deux the feeling of a mini-drama between two people, which in turn can become the subject of a ballet, as in *In the Night* or, in an indirect way, *Afternoon of a Faun*. In his choreography for ensembles, the dancers also communicate with their eyes ("Look at me," "I remember," "Come dance with me") and take cues from one another ("Now you do that"). This, of course, draws the viewers' interest, as we try to decode what is happening beyond the steps and the music. The dancers selected for the Robbins repertory typically have strong, well-defined person-

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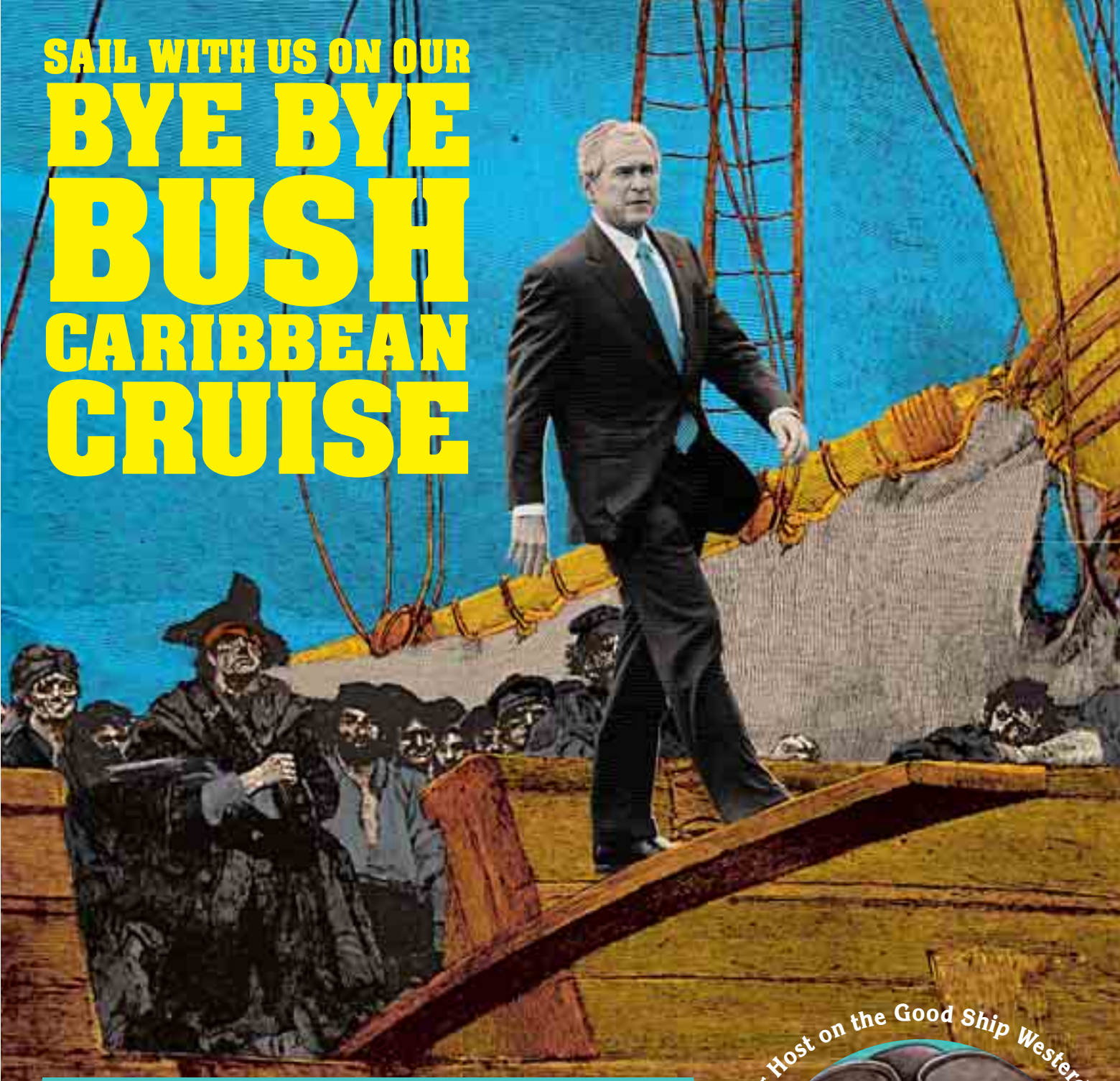

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alities that they bring to the stage; they do not tend to dazzle with their technique (which isn't to say that many of them are not strong technicians) but rather capture our attention through their ability to fully embody a role, to both lose themselves and find themselves in it. And they tend to be the same dancers from one ballet to the next, which allows for the development of a sense of trust and ease, with one another and with the audience.

Sometimes, when performing Robbins, the dancers look like they're having a grand old time, in a way that transcends theatrical illusion. At the Robbins Celebration, this was especially striking (to me) in two ballets: *N.Y. Export: Opus Jazz* (a "pure dance" follow-up to *West Side Story*) and *Goldberg Variations*, particularly in a teasing pas de deux set to a playful little canon (variation eighteen), danced here by Gonzalo García and Wendy Whelan. Just as in the music—where one voice presents the theme, which is picked up a beat later by another voice at a lower register—in the dance García made a move, which Whelan repeated back to him, followed by another, which she again repeated, and on they went. It had the distinct feeling of a game; at one point, they actually rolled with Falstaffian laughter before starting over. Silly, yes, but their real pleasure in this game of follow the leader was dazzling and infectious.

*N.Y. Export*, an ensemble work set to a jazzy score by Robert Prince, is meant to evoke the rebellious urban street culture of the 1950s. The dancers, most of them from the corps, responded to the steps and the music with such gusto that what could have been a half-convincing period piece with lots of finger snaps, jazzy knees and hands held out on droopy wrists like paws seemed to crackle on the stage. In a section of the ballet titled "Statics," Georgina Pazcoguin dances a sexy number opposite three guys: at first she teases them, dancing provocatively for their pleasure and her own; then she becomes entangled in an openly sexual pas de deux with one while the other two watch the interactions with voyeuristic interest; and finally she ends up being "attacked" by all three. Here, watching has provoked action, of an ugly sort. Recently, Pazcoguin described her sensations as she dances this section: "I get a sense of fear right after the pas with Andy…when I come up from the floor, after that I have a clear [sense], I mean these boys are all around me, I have to get out.… It's that intense.… I always come [out of] that section feeling absolutely exhilarated." The feeling is palpable, electric, and it has the effect of elevating the quartet into something more than a somewhat dated study in style. In fact, the dancers enjoy this ballet so much that two of them, Ellen Bar and Sean Suozzi, have begun to make a cinematic version (*Opus Jazz: The Film*) filmed on location in various suggestive spots around New York City, including the abandoned High Line on the West Side.

**Robbins's ballets sometimes suffer from simulated intimacy or cloying self-consciousness.**

As in "Statics," the act of watching is not always innocent. Consider *Afternoon of a Faun*, which is literally about looking: how dancers look at each other and themselves. In this ingenious eleven-minute pas de deux set to Debussy's beguiling "Prélude à l'après-midi d'un Faune," two dancers in immaculate practice clothes (the boy is bare-chested, the girl wears a lovely diaphanous thigh-length tunic, with her long hair loose) "rehearse" together in what must be the loveliest studio ever built. The walls are made of sheer fabric, caressed by a breeze, filled with a soft, even light; a deep blue backdrop glows through openings indicating where the door, window and skylight would be. The fourth wall, which would be at the front of the stage, is the mirror. As the boy and girl stretch and gaze at their reflection, then try out a few lifts and supported turns, they gaze out at the audience, who of course watch them just as intently. The two almost never look at each other, except in their "reflection." The erotic attraction they feel is at once negated and intensified by the device of the mirror, and the ambiguity is augmented by the reality that this "intimate" moment is being watched by thousands of pairs of eyes.

This kind of self-consciousness can wear thin, however. There is something artificial, even phony, about *Afternoon of a Faun*—the simulated intimacy, the concealment of effort, the aestheticization of details. The phoniness creeps into other ballets as well. After spending a few years in the late '60s exploring experimental theater—and influenced by the work of his younger friend Robert Wilson, who had an interest in Japanese theater—Robbins made an hour-long ballet called *Watermill* (1969) about a man (in effect, Robbins himself) looking back on his life. The ballet uses techniques borrowed from Noh and Kabuki and an original score for traditional Japanese instruments. The slowly evolving set is stunningly beautiful, with a waxing and waning moon, kites, a rickety fence on the right side of the stage, sheaves of grain and Japanese lanterns. The ballet too has its powerful moments. The slow-motion effect Robbins was experimenting with is interesting (especially in a drawn-out, sensual and acrobatic pas de deux), but the Asian wash is disconcerting, and in the end it dilutes the impact of the ballet rather than enhancing it. Why is everything Japanese?

Something similar happens in *Dybbuk*, Robbins's version of S. Ansky's play of the same name, which draws on Jewish mystical themes. For all Robbins's fascination with his Eastern European Jewish origins, the illustrations of Kabbalistic imagery here feel undigested, fake, aestheticized to the point of meaninglessness. The pas de deux has a strange, geometric quality that does little to illustrate the situation of the two lovers; the occult power of the Kabbalah remains a mystery. Compare that with the full-blooded treatment of Jewish folk life in *Fiddler on the Roof*: the bottle dance at the wedding, the Russian dances at the pub. Even *Dances at a Gathering* suffers from this prettified vision; the people in Robbins's community suffer and pine, but there is no space for real anguish in this world. Even death, the cloud that passes overhead at the end of the ballet, makes its presence felt only for a brief moment, after which all is right again.

Damian Woetzel, recently retired from City Ballet, told the dance writer Rachel Straus, "Jerry's dream, what he liked, was the idea of dancing as though you didn't know the audience was there. You're on stage but going through this experience alone. You're doodling to some extent." This is the illusion: to create a performance that allows the audience to forget that this is a ballet, with steps that will be the same night after night, and that these dancers are highly trained technicians, hardly people like themselves. The idea is that we will see them as people trying out steps, making discoveries, relating to one another. It's a trick, of course, and as such it can leave the viewer feeling manipulated or, worse, unconvinced and untouched. And yet Robbins's embrace of the representational illusion of dance is what makes his ballets, and his musical theater, truly magical in some way: at their best, they create an atmosphere that stays with us long after the curtain has fallen and the dancers have gone on their way, taking the night air. ■

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# The Searchers

**by MOUSTAFA BAYOUMI**

**Mirror of the Arab World**
*Lebanon in Conflict.*
By Sandra Mackey.
Norton. 303 pp. $25.95.

**Artillery of Heaven**
*American Missionaries and the Failed Conversion of the Middle East.*
By Ussama Makdisi.
Cornell. 262 pp. $35.

**Origins**
*A Memoir.*
By Amin Maalouf.
Farrar, Straus and Giroux. 404 pp. $26.

While living in Europe in 1992, I came across an article in a French magazine about the man credited with founding Egyptian cinema. His name, to my surprise, was Mohamed Bayoumi—the same as my father's—and he lived from 1894 to 1963, mostly in Cairo. That summer I traveled to Egypt to visit my family, and one afternoon in Alexandria, while sitting with my uncle, aunt and grandmother in my grandmother's airy bedroom, I asked her if this Mohamed Bayoumi the *cinéaste* was related to me. Had he been part of our family?

"What's he asking?" she said, turning to my uncle, her eyebrows in knots.

The question caught everyone off guard. Moments later my aunt broke the silence. "Oh!" she said, clarity illuminating her face. "He wants to know about roots!" She emphasized the last word by saying it in English. Suddenly everyone understood. They were smiling and laughing, finding the question quaintly endearing. My uncle turned to me. "Like the TV show, huh?" he interjected, in English. "You want to know your roots!" Apparently, the 1977 miniseries based on Alex Haley's book had made a lasting impression in Egypt.

It was an odd exchange. With the Mediterranean breeze blowing through my grandmother's apartment, the politics of the diaspora mingled with the global reach of American culture. On the one hand, there I was, wondering if I might unearth something about my Egyptian family. (Born to Egyptian parents, I've lived my entire life, except for regular visits, outside Egypt.) I ventured a question that, I assumed, illustrated my growing knowledge of my relatives' homeland and its cultural patrimony. On the other hand, my relatives were mostly amused by my question. Rather than regarding it as evidence of my Egyptianness, they found it to be very, well, American—African-American, even. Had my interest in roots made me appear rootless in their eyes?

To a budding movement on anthropology's right wing, such subtle intrafamily differences are trivial and best brushed aside in order to focus on the fact that all Arabs are tribal. Forget Islam. Tribalism is in, and it is being promoted as the key to explaining the distress of the Middle East. In "The Middle East's Tribal DNA," from a recent issue of *Middle East Quarterly*, Philip Carl Salzman writes that Arabs, universally and throughout history, organize their societies along a series of "nested" relationships—family, lineage, clan, tribe, confederacy, sect and religion—with each group larger than the preceding one. Indeed, Islam, in this account, postdates tribalism; with its ability to magnify the difference between believer and nonbeliever, it's simply the largest tribe of all. Tribalism is inescapable because Arab culture demands loyalty to the group above every other human value. According to Salzman, tribal loyalty explains peace, where tribes of equal standing face off in "balanced opposition," and war, because tribalism also "normalizes antipathy against outsiders," thus promoting conquest as a means of expanding the tribe. Whether in times of peace or war, tribalism fosters an antagonistic social world that will always trump the rationality of the modern state and the abstract rule of law.

Tribes, of course, do exist in the Middle East but not in the way that tribal theorists think they do. For one thing, tribes don't have fixed memberships. Instead, they are often created out of loose and contingent notions of relatedness. A kind of fictive ancestry is constantly made and remade to connect people to resources and power. The problem with the tribal theorists isn't that they identify tribes where there are none; rather, it's that they straitjacket and exaggerate the meaning of tribal dynamics; their version of tribalism explains virtually everything. But silver-bullet theories should always be taken with a grain of salt, or sand, in this case. They enchain more than they explain; history disappears as the behavior of an entire group is presumed to exhibit an ossified consistency across vast geographical regions and over centuries of time. Colonialism, warfare, occupation, imperialism, militarism, despotism and poverty are relegated to near insignificance, treated as consequences of tribalism rather than causes of social upheavals and a tribe's metamorphoses. Instead of recognizing that tribal authority grows, or gets promoted, when a central state is weakened or destroyed, as in present-day Iraq, tribalist theory presumes that tribes always impede the growth of the state.

Enthusiasm for the tribal thesis is not limited to academic journals or conservative magazines like *National Review*, which in February 2007 published two inaccurate online articles by Stanley Kurtz about Arab marriage patterns. The thesis was the subject of a fawning *New York Times* column by David Brooks in April 2008. In 2003 the Brookings Institution commissioned a study on the tribal structure of Iraqi society. Meanwhile, the US military is pouring significant resources into a tribal strategy in Iraq. By doling out influence, weapons and money to tribes, the Americans, like their British imperial counterparts of the past, are promoting tribal loyalty and authority to anchor their own ability to divide and rule. A sober 2008 article by Austin Long, a political scientist at the RAND Corporation, however, finds the strategy dangerous and confounding. The article quotes an exasperated American intelligence officer comparing Iraqi society to Latin American telenovelas "in drama and complexity." Yet undeterred by its own ignorance, the American military marches on, essentially ceding territory to tribal leaders it doesn't understand. Such a strategy, warns the RAND article, possibly "sows the seeds of future state failure."

Sandra Mackey has climbed aboard the tribal bandwagon. In *Mirror of the Arab World*, the Atlanta-based journalist and author of several books on the Middle East argues that the most expeditious way to understand the Arab world as a whole is to examine the tortured past and tenuous present of Lebanon. Mackey correctly points out that virtually every major conflict in the region has involved or had an impact on Lebanon, and that a close examination of the country will reveal much about the fissures of the larger region. Her investigation delves briefly into European colonial history, postcolonial corruption, the Palestinian catastrophe, refu-

*Moustafa Bayoumi is an associate professor at Brooklyn College. He is a co-editor of* The Edward Said Reader *(Vintage) and the author of* How Does It Feel to Be a Problem? Being Young and Arab in America *(Penguin Press).*

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Map circa 1860

gees, civil wars, sectarian strife and the rise of political Islam. Despite the book's political focus, Mackey seems less interested in explaining the intrigues of geopolitics and more in judging a culture. According to her, the Lebanese are reluctant to find solutions to their intractable problems primarily because they are prisoners of tribalism.

This reluctance is not peculiar to Lebanon, Mackey argues. "All Arab societies," she sweepingly proclaims, "are in some degree tribal." "Wedded to group," she writes, "the individual Arab is reluctant to invest his or her identity or security in the state," making tribalism "the great deterrent to political stability and economic development in Arab countries." This is clearly ridiculous. Egyptian society, which accounts for one-quarter of the Arab world's population, could never legitimately be described as tribal. Class is the salient factor there. Mackey also repeatedly hammers away at the idea that confusion about "identity" is the root cause and not the consequence of the various conflicts in the region. In today's globalizing world, she writes, Arabs lead "tangled lives," beset by a "crisis of identity" so profound that "their inner selves retreat into the primordial ties of ethnicity, language, and religion."

*Mirror of the Arab World* is a jumble of generalizations in search of a theory. Mackey is lukewarm about Samuel Huntington's notion of a "clash of civilizations," calling it "neither entirely right nor totally wrong," and opts instead for a "contest of cultures," which is just a gentler kind of clash. Still, in Mackey's account this contest has the function of establishing the enduring dissimilarity of tribal Arabs from us Westerners. In the end, Mackey explains that bridging these essential differences is an aim of her book. "If East and West are to survive and prosper in a world in which they can no longer remain separated geographically, economically, or even culturally, then understanding must come from both sides," she writes. "This book has been an attempt to begin that process in the West."

Yet her attempt is hampered by her odd detachment from the region she describes. Mackey begins her book by limiting the Arab world to just eleven countries, bizarrely excluding Yemen and all of North Africa except Egypt from her map. Moreover, she doesn't tell any stories of individuals living through the troubled history she recounts. Stories, after all, can have a way of complicating ideology, questioning stereotypes and fleshing out human agency and motive. Instead, Mackey begins each chapter with a geography lesson: "The Nejd is a waterless ocean"; "Fingers of the Nile slowly wander through the wide delta." Mackey depicts the Arab world as landscapes devoid of people. Absent any sense of concrete reality and human life, the region is a caldron of primordial actions, extreme passions and vengeful humiliations, a recipe that reduces Arabs to objects worthy of pity instead of portraying them as people to encounter and understand.

In Mackey's view, Arabs and Americans

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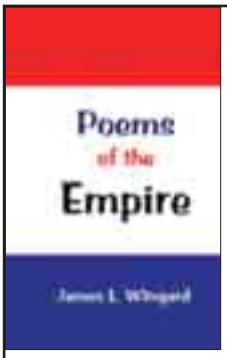


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are ontologically separate people who are now suddenly careening toward each other, "two trains…racing toward each other on the same track." But is this really true? Such a view assumes, for one thing, that US involvement in the region is recent and categorically imperialist. But Americans have been present in the Middle East for more than a century, and the modern Middle East has never been separate from Europe or its other neighbors, either culturally, economically or politically. Understanding the relatedness rather than separateness of our conditions may portend greater rewards. Two recent books on the Middle East, Ussama Makdisi's wonderfully interesting *Artillery of Heaven* and Amin Maalouf's tender family memoir *Origins*, move precisely in this direction.

Both works focus on nineteenth-century Lebanon, but their utmost concern is the sectarian divisions that stifle the country today. Where they differ from Mackey's book is in demonstrating how such divisions are historical rather than spawned ex nihilo. Both books are eager to resuscitate overlooked Lebanese figures who tried to forge their own worldly ethics as a bulwark against the narrow sectarian reality imposed by various forces: local authorities, a crumbling Ottoman Empire and meddling European powers. The last would include the French, who long supported the Maronite population in Mount Lebanon, and the British, who favored the Druses (identifying them as the Scottish Highlanders of the East). But what is perhaps most striking is how in Makdisi's and Maalouf's telling, the work of American missionaries and their local converts in Lebanon takes prominence over the presence of Europeans there, an emphasis that reflects each author's commitment to treating the relationship between the United States and Lebanon as more than the sum of recent dark times.

*Artillery of Heaven* is essentially the story of two men, As'ad Shidyaq and Butrus al-Bustani, both Maronites who converted to Protestantism under the guidance of nineteenth-century American missionaries. Their stories, decades apart, also span the two phases of missionary activity described by Makdisi. More profoundly, both stories speak to the failed promise of fashioning new identities and forging new futures in an age of competing interests and entrenched orthodoxies.

Born in 1798, Shidyaq—his last name means subdeacon—became, in 1825, the first Arabic-speaking Protestant convert of an American missionary. Before he converted, he had been a Maronite seminary student in 'Ayn Waraqa, whose curriculum emphasized loyalty and obedience to the Maronite patriarch. But Shidyaq had come under the influence of the Americans, who after their failures to convert Native Americans had decided as early as 1818 to launch a proselytizing mission to Palestine and then Syria. (Makdisi sets the Native American mission in counterpoint to the missionary movements to the Middle East.) Due to Ottoman restrictions on proselytizing to Muslims, the Americans focused their efforts primarily on the native Christians of the region; it was a missionary named Jonas King, in particular, who was most affecting to the young Shidyaq. Unlike many of his ilk, King was keen on learning the culture and ways of the local population. In the summer of 1825, he contracted with Shidyaq, who would be taken by King's uncommon sincerity and extreme simplicity, to teach him Syriac.

Maronite authorities objected to Shidyaq's conversion. They found it heretical and the handiwork of dangerous outsiders waiting to stir up trouble in an established Christian social order within the Muslim Ottoman Empire. In 1826 Shidyaq was summoned to the monastery of Mar Jirjis 'Alma, where he was pressured to recant his beliefs publicly and affirm that his faith "was in accordance with the Roman Church." He refused. He claimed not to be in complete harmony with the Americans and their ways but remained unwilling to submit to the Maronite authorities. "There is nobody like me, and I please nobody," he is reported to have said. Eventually detained in the Qannubin Monastery, Shidyaq was starved and repeatedly tortured. Meanwhile, the Greek rebellion was sending shock waves through the Ottoman Empire, and the Americans, concerned for their safety, departed the region in 1828. They returned in 1830, but it was too late to save their convert. Shidyaq died soon thereafter.

Shidyaq was "the first to try to disassociate American ideas from American culture," Makdisi writes, and his conversion troubled the status quo profoundly. The Maronite religious establishment would not allow its authority to be challenged by a "heretic." The Shihab Emirs, the leaders of Mount Lebanon, likewise found no reason to aid someone who was upsetting the order of things. The British consul was standoffish. And although Shidyaq's case was never presented to Ottoman authorities, it would have been treated as an internal Christian affair anyway, making Shidyaq "a casualty of Ottoman tolerance." (Makdisi is strong in describing the complexities of coexistence between Christian and Muslim communi-

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ties in Ottoman times.) The Americans, having come to "renovate the world," but with no clue as to how the rest of the world functioned, had made a mess of things.

If As'ad Shidyaq is the martyr of *Artillery of Heaven*, Butrus al-Bustani is its hero. He had also converted to Protestantism and founded a Protestant church in Beirut in 1848, two years before Protestants were granted legal recognition by Ottoman rulers. Missionary schools at this time taught a great many things, including the English language, and this curriculum attracted many converts looking to expand their horizons in a new era. Such aspirations made the missionary elite nervous. Warning of "mercenary motives among the native Christians," Rufus Anderson, the secretary to the American Board, demanded an end to English-language instruction. Only Arabic was to be taught at missionary schools. The aim of the missionary movement, after all, was to produce natives capable of running their own churches. "There were hierarchies to be maintained," explains Makdisi. "Christian universalism did not imply, let alone mean, equality."

Bustani's patron at the time was the American maverick Cornelius Van Dyck. Unlike many other missionaries, Van Dyck mastered Arabic, believed in Christian fellowship across cultures and emphasized the importance of secular, scientific knowledge for all. Bustani and Van Dyck worked together in a relocated seminary in Abey. They also joined the Syrian Society of Arts and Sciences, a secular, progressive organization that delved into all questions except those concerning "religious rites and doctrines."

Through these associations, Bustani eventually transformed a proselytizing American Christianity into an ecumenical proto–Arab nationalism. He had been part of a missionary system that endorsed the backward nature of the "Arab race" and that limited native education to the Arabic language, but by way of appropriation and adaptation, Bustani would champion the "Arab race," extol the beauties of the Arabic language and become known as the father of the Arab renaissance. He would also compose a narrative about As'ad Shidyaq, drawing the lesson that for coexistence to succeed, church and state must be separated. By 1863 he had founded his National School, open to students from multiple religious backgrounds. (Within a few years, a new Arabic translation of the Bible was available, and the Syrian Protestant College—which would later become the American University of Beirut—was founded.) Ecumenicalism was its ethos, though students were still given religious instruction in their own faiths. The curriculum included literary and scientific subjects (taught in Arabic) and English, French, Greek, Latin and Turkish; in this way, Bustani's vision was radically different from the Syrian Protestant College's. The latter's was paternalistic and narrow. Bustani's was ecumenical and national. Naturally the American leadership found him to be "selfish, proud, and excessively vain."

Makdisi is certainly not the first to locate the origins of Arab nationalism within the missionary movement, but that's not really his aim. Rather, he wants to demonstrate that progressive, secular, ecumenical ideas have prospered in Lebanon, only to be repeatedly eradicated by insiders and outsiders, each according to their own agenda. "In Lebanon," he writes, "coexistence has become a mantra rather than part of a credible historical narrative."

Amin Maalouf's *Origins* picks up where *Artillery of Heaven* leaves off, and while both books are intriguing, they benefit from being read together. Maalouf's setting is the Greek Catholic villages of Mount Lebanon, and his story runs roughly from the latter part of the nineteenth century to the early years of the twentieth. Like Makdisi, he also focuses on two stories and describes a heady period of fluctuating authority, frustrated opportunities and new notions of citizenship and belonging. The first story concerns his paternal grandfather, Botros; the second, his great-uncle Gebrayel, who left Lebanon for the Americas at 18.

First published in France in 2004, *Origins* keeps the American missionaries largely offstage, their labors supplanted by local converts (the memory of Cornelius Van Dyck is acknowledged, and he is fondly remembered as a strict ascetic). A man named Khalil is one such convert. In 1882 he takes Botros under his wing, educating him until Botros leaves his village for Abey, where he eventually begins teaching in the American mission school. Despite his missionary education, Botros never converted to Protestantism. He did, however, excel in the study of English and Arabic, moving eventually to Beirut in 1894, where he studied law, Turkish and French before returning to teach Arabic rhetoric and mathematics, this time at the Greek Catholic Patriarch's school in Zahle.

Unhappy with the teaching life, he opted to join his younger brother Gebrayel in the Americas in 1902, but emigration left Botros cold. He returned to Lebanon four years later, eventually marrying and establishing, to the horror of the Greek Catholic estab-

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lishment, his own Universal School. Similar to Bustani's, it would be an ecumenical institution that would enroll students from all denominations represented in the immediate vicinity: Greek Catholic, Greek Orthodox, Maronite and Protestant. Rumors spread about Botros being an atheist. He wandered around the village without wearing anything on his head, and when he refused to have his children baptized he was considered a near lunatic. Still, the school opened in 1913, supported in part by American funds (which later raised the suspicions of the French Mandate authorities), and remained in operation for twenty-two years.

If Makdisi sees in Bustani's story the example of a successful nationalism based on coexistence, Maalouf sees his grandfather as an embodiment of turn-of-the-century cosmopolitanism. From his early novel *Leo Africanus* (1986) to his later monograph *In the Name of Identity: Violence and the Need to Belong* (1996), Maalouf has made cosmopolitanism one of his central concerns. It has its obvious seductions, especially in light of the era discussed in *Origins*, when the question of belonging—of what it means to be Lebanese or Christian or Ottoman—was at once dynamic and oppressive, open and restrictive. That Maalouf wants readers to grasp that the treacheries of this time anticipate Lebanon's many contemporary divisions is not surprising, but perhaps his impatience with tolerance is. He disdains the concept, calling it "protection bestowed condescendingly by the conquerors on the conquered." Cosmopolitanism is more what he is after, a pluralism that is generous and elastic and recognizes that people harbor multiple identities. Consider how he describes his grandparents' world:

> Their state was Turkey, their language Arabic, their province Syria, and their homeland the Lebanon Mountains. Of course, in addition, they had their diverse religious denominations, which probably weighed on their lives more than the rest. These allegiances did not exist in harmony, proof being the many massacres mentioned earlier; but there was a degree of fluidity about both names and frontiers, which vanished after the rise of the nationalist movements.

Maalouf labels this type of plural belonging patriotism, in contrast to the narrow cast of nationalism. He explains that Botros was electrified by the rebellion of the Young Turks in 1908, until their Turkocentric tail went way up (tragically for the Armenians). Botros had little patience for the Greek Catholic establishment and even less for the French. But he was not a Lebanese nationalist, according to Maalouf. He was an Ottoman "patriot." Nationalists are exclusionary, whereas "patriots dreamed of an empire where diverse groups could coexist—groups speaking different languages and professing different beliefs, but united by a common desire to build a large modern homeland."

True patriots are cosmopolitans who stay at home. But what about those who leave? Enter Maalouf's great-uncle Gebrayel. Departing Lebanon in 1895 at 18, he landed in New York City, where he immediately fell in with a community of Cuban exiles, eventually adopting their struggle. By 1898 he had relocated with them to the newly liberated island, quickly achieving the archetypal success story of the Lebanese emigrant: leaving the village with no bags and just some olives and two loaves of bread, and ending up a decade later as one of the richest men in Cuba (or Mexico, Australia, Venezuela or Liberia).

Gebrayel struck out for Cuba during an era when Lebanese were leaving their homes in droves. Between 1890 and 1920, more than a third of Mount Lebanon's peasants sailed to the Americas. For a long time the sectarian massacres of the 1860 war between Christians and Druses were thought to be the cause of such large-scale emigration, but recent scholarship has focused on contractions in the local and global economy. Maalouf simply suggests that disillusionment was common at the time: "All those who emigrated, all those who rebelled, and even all those who dreamed of a more equitable world, were chiefly motivated by the fact that they couldn't fit into the social and political system that governed their mother country." Maalouf left his mother country in 1976, after the outbreak of civil war, and relocated to Paris, where he still lives. Botros, like Gebrayel and the author, also left. But he returned and gave up on leaving, a decision that appears to have impressed Maalouf and even made him jealous of his grandfather. "The reason the country has fallen so low," Botros wrote in a play he composed before leaving for the Americas, "is precisely because so many of its children choose to leave rather than reform it."

The despair of such counsel is acute, and after finishing *Origins*, I was touched by its understated sadness about emigration's dislocations. Call it another form of "transcendental homelessness." Its melancholy doesn't spring from the tragedy of dispossession, as with the Palestinian saga. Maalouf's sorrow is smaller, his pathos expressed in a lower register. It's as if he's saying that emigration, with its promises of cosmopolitan worldli-

## Film Threat

*(after George Romero; for Mike Kelleher)*

The survivors barricade a bay window with plywood, an old armoire, an empty refrigerator and it is dark enough within to read by candlelight. Through a crack you can see two eyes and a mouth in shadow and a night filled with intent, glittering teeth. What the image tells us—that the hunger of the zombie, however slow, does not sleep, that the cottage and everyone in it is surrounded by rage, and inside no one will admit the possibility of cowardice aloud, even as the wine is decanted, the cream sauce simmers, and Mendelssohn plays on a stereo somewhere in the background. But maybe we have it wrong. The dead do not hate the living; love hates the dead for being dead and again and again summons them back because of this. One day, and soon, the boards will come down and the zombies will break in and devour everything in their path and yet someone will raise a shotgun and shoot the beloved who is no longer the beloved but something else, some other wanton thing that wears a recognizable face and someone in the audience will wonder if that is how we are meant to survive our memories.

RICHARD DEMING

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ness, is a lonely trip where you collect your luggage alone at anonymous carousels and drive through bland, unfamiliar landscapes to nowhere, a bilingual dictionary in your pocket and the acrid taste of Nescafé on your tongue. Hope burns your bloodshot eyes as you wait to be embraced by new friends, or yearn for home. By abandoning the country of your origins, Maalouf seems to be asking, do you also leave your responsibilities, and something of yourself, behind? The cosmopolitanism of the emigrant may be easy to embrace, but the cosmopolitan who stays home is the real hero. "You've been living abroad for too long," Maalouf is told by two elderly village men when he searches for his grandfather's tombstone one day. "You've forgotten that around here we don't visit the dead."

In Egypt they do. My grandmother had never heard of the *cinéaste* Mohamed Bayoumi. Neither had my aunt or uncle. But that hasn't stopped me from searching for a connection. ■

# Photo Ops

**by MEGAN BUSKEY**

One afternoon in early September, the Czech photographer Josef Koudelka was administering a bottle of cognac to a group of well-wishers at the Pace/MacGill Gallery, two placid, spacious rooms on the ninth floor of an office building on Fifty-seventh Street in Manhattan. The occasion was the opening of an anniversary exhibition of photographs Koudelka had taken forty years earlier, during the invasion of Prague by Warsaw Pact forces tasked with extinguishing the Czech spirit of political reform. At the time, Koudelka was 30 and a relative newcomer to his art. He had never taken photographs for the purpose of reportage (his portfolio at the time mostly featured pictures of Gypsies and the theater), but he turned out to have a natural gift for documentary photography.

I sampled a glass of cognac and strolled around the gallery. The mood was decidedly midday. Two schoolgirls had piled their satchels and jackets next to the entrance; crayon drawings were scattered nearby. A mixture of Czech, French and English wafted casually throughout the rooms. People lingered in front of each of the eighteen black-and-white photographs on display, most of which are reproduced in *Invasion 68: Prague* (Aperture, $60), the elegant, well-researched book that served as the basis for the exhibition. A much larger selection of the book's contents was to be unveiled later that evening in a companion show at Aperture Gallery in Chelsea (open through October 30).

Koudelka's greatest strengths as a photographer are his emotional acuity and narrative sensibility. At Pace/MacGill, there was a shot of two Czech men who look like students triumphantly bearing a bedraggled Czech flag while small fires smolder near their feet. The Soviets, who enjoyed cementing their sense of destiny with monuments to military victory, could not have come up with a more stirring composition. Koudelka's knack for storytelling is apparent in a photo in which two Russian troops struggle to leave an ambushed tank as a third, his gun cocked, contemplates a nearby Czech who holds his jacket open, daring the soldier to shoot his exposed chest. The most wrenching photo shows a dumb-

© JOSEF KOUDELKA/MAGNUM PHOTOS

Wenceslas Square, Prague, 1968

*Megan Buskey is a writer based in Brooklyn.*

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founded old man standing in front of two singed, bullet-ridden apartment buildings, his eyes as dark as the vacant spaces behind him that were once outfitted with windows.

Through a series of underground connections, a smattering of the nearly 10,000 photos Koudelka took during the invasion were smuggled out of Czechoslovakia and shown to the president of Magnum Photos. A year after the invasion, a handful of them appeared in Britain in the *Sunday Times*. To protect Koudelka, who rightly feared for his safety, they were attributed to "P.P."—or Prague Photographer. The photos were suppressed in the Soviet Union, but in the West they became award-winning and iconic. It's easy to see why: the photos spoke clearly to the concerns of a generation. For those who fretted about a cold war suddenly turning hot, the photos expressed the fear of conflict and disorder. To aspirants of radical political change, the photos delivered the message that progress could be suddenly and violently halted. The recent short war between Georgia and Russia gives the photos a renewed resonance—they are stark reminders of how boundaries and lives can be violated by fear and force.

Shortly after the Prague photos were published, Magnum helped Koudelka secure asylum in Britain. He joined the prestigious collective in 1971 and has since produced remarkable collections on the themes of Gypsies and exile. At Pace/MacGill I approached Koudelka, now a jumpy, hirsute 70-year-old, to ask whether as a young Czech he had felt any solidarity with democratic movements occurring in France, Mexico and Brazil. He greeted me amiably, and we clinked glasses. At my question, however, he swatted his hand and turned momentarily away. "Look," he said in a thick Slavic accent, "I don't want to talk to reporters right now. I have many friends here." Seeing the disappointment in my face, he continued, "But I will say that I hated the regime. I hated what it stood for. I hope that these photographs can help prevent people from forgetting the tragedy that took place." He lifted his glass again and offered a parting "cheers."

Outside Aperture's building in Chelsea, smartly dressed people gathered in twos and threes, checking their cellphones and taking discreet swigs of bottled beer in the light spilling from the gallery. Koudelka's photos of *samizdat* posters had been printed on cheap paper and plastered on a construction barricade next to the gallery door. One of them read "Go home!" in Russian, and features a finger pointing to the right-hand margin of the page. Another figured the Soviet Union as a portly man brandishing a gigantic revolver and the Czech Socialist Republic as a cowering little girl in pigtails. There were more posters in the gallery, but the space was crowded, hot and loud. No one was even pretending to look at the art.

Unlike the show at Pace/MacGill, which focused on the destruction and revolt the invasion sparked, Aperture showcases a broader range of the Prague photos. Ian Berry, a Magnum photographer present in Prague during the invasion, remembered Koudelka as "an absolute maniac…who was actually just going up to the Russians, clambering over their tanks and photographing them openly." Photographs taken from the street chronicle the dramatic first moments of the invasion: a column of tanks thunders down a cobblestone street; a line of people are stopped and pushed to the edges of the sidewalk, and helplessly watch the procession. There are photographs Koudelka snapped while atop a tank, its long nose effortlessly parting a sea of bystanders. And there are photos of the grim denouement of the invasion—one poignant image shows walls once covered with anti-Soviet graffiti painted an obliterating white, signaling the capitulation of the Czech reformers.

For all the brutality of the invasion and occupation—there is a lot of smoke, fire and blood in these pictures—Koudelka's work captures the uncertainty and listlessness of the invading troops. One of the most striking images shows rows of erect Czechs singing to an uneven line of armed soldiers, whose slumped shoulders and loosely grasped weapons convey boredom and discomfort. Another captures a group of Soviet soldiers perched languidly on top of a tank, craning their necks to talk to members of the crowd, who swarm insistently around their feet. Koudelka's photos expose imperialism with a sullen human face.

Koudelka returned to Prague in 1991. By then the Velvet Revolution had ushered in a democratically elected government and the Soviet tanks and troops had been gone for a year. Koudelka now lives in Prague and Paris, but he retains the sensibility of his years as an itinerant exile. In an interview with the Aperture curator, Koudelka reveals that his favorite word is "next"; as he describes it, the word implies "moving, continuing, never stopping." As I squeezed my way to the exit of Aperture, through the crush of the crowd, Koudelka scampered by, flushed and sweaty. He seemed eager to meet whatever might happen next. ■

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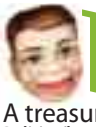
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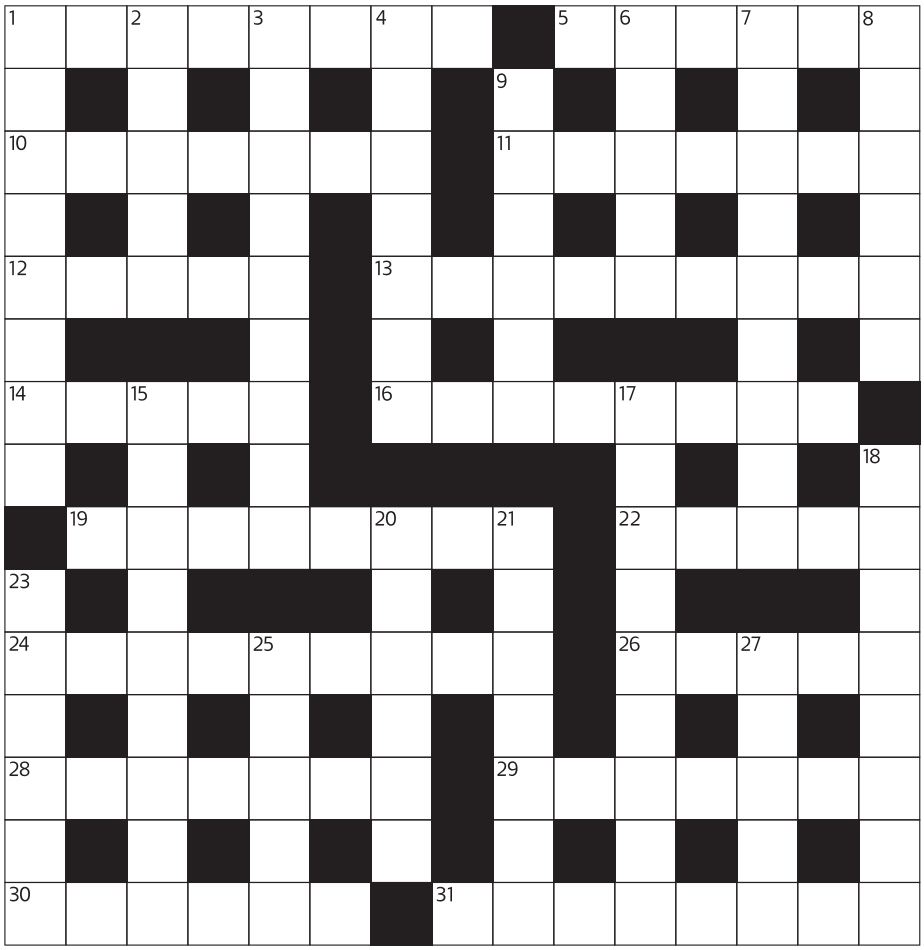

## ACROSS

**1** Awful pain, with a word of course that could be produced onstage, only put on by women. (8)

**5** You shouldn't leave things hanging in such a fashion—being found in the central part of the tune. (3-3)

**10** In place, is returning to the French, marking those ready to be called up. (7)

**11** Sales pitches prove to be wrong in what British homeowners pay. (7)

**12** At first the scale is supposed to be good for you, at the junction with a false coin. (5)

**13** Wildly happy with the former spouse over in Germany, with a busy working type. (9)

**14** and **24** They take away what a live wire will give you, and get you over the bumpy parts. (5,9)

**16** Such a boat could hold quite a bit of beer. (8)

**19** They supposedly lead a low life, with vegetables being given to the workers. (8)

**22** Defensive ditch, holding a ship with the enemy about. (5)

**24** See 14

**26** Such a count could be a knockout, frequently. (5)

**28** Put on a play with vegetables, obviously in favor of the Italian leader. (7)

**29** A person of a foreign land is not exactly real with one. (7)

**30** Often trees have part of the meal to show for it. (6)

**31** Benedict Arnold, for example, turning green with drink. (8)

## DOWN

**1** A character of *The Mikado* has a shipwreck, and finally gets shut out. (4-4)

**2** The man without a country, with no language to show it. (5)

**3** Maybe starts with the first course, and ends up with the last—or is just a seafood dish in itself. (4-5)

**4** Proving some of you guys out there are Reds, possibly. (7)

**6** I point around a disheveled bum to fill with color, inspiration, etc. (5)

**7** Such as the aardvark show a way to toss in your chips, and stare in a nasty fashion. (9)

**8** What one does with the clock at both ends of the summer season, possibly. (6)

**9** The old model you rode in has a not-so-smooth finish—but it's a place to eat for the lower types. (6)

**15** One hopes not to do it with the mark, and hovers around, also coming up. (4-5)

**17** Having lost your way, but not on the golf circuit! (3-6)

**18** Not a very nice occasion, possibly associated with Greenwich during a spell of it. (8)

**20** Had to have the answer! (6)

**21** Bring you and me up to the top of the church, for a long sigh. (7)

**23** A number with fruit being spotted. (6)

**25** The outer sort of path to travel. (5)

**27** Classic letter that is crumpled about a certain point. (5)

## SOLUTION TO PUZZLE NO. 3142

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | A | P | P | O | R | T | I | O | N | I | N | G | | |
| W | | R | | B | | R | | P | | S | | R | | U |
| O | P | E | N | S | E | A | | E | A | S | T | E | R | N |
| R | | D | | T | | P | | R | | U | | N | | N |
| K | O | A | L | A | | P | L | A | C | E | N | A | M | E |
| W | | T | | C | | I | | | | D | | D | | C |
| I | D | E | A | L | I | S | T | I | C | | R | A | C | E |
| T | | | | E | | T | | R | | B | | | | S |
| H | A | R | P | | A | S | S | O | C | I | A | T | E | S |
| A | | E | | O | | | | N | | R | | R | | A |
| W | A | D | S | W | O | R | T | H | | T | O | P | E | R |
| I | | D | | N | | U | | O | | H | | I | | I |
| L | O | I | A | S | I | S | | R | E | D | P | O | L | L |
| L | | S | | U | | T | | S | | A | | C | | Y |
| | | H | A | P | P | Y | N | E | W | Y | E | A | R | |

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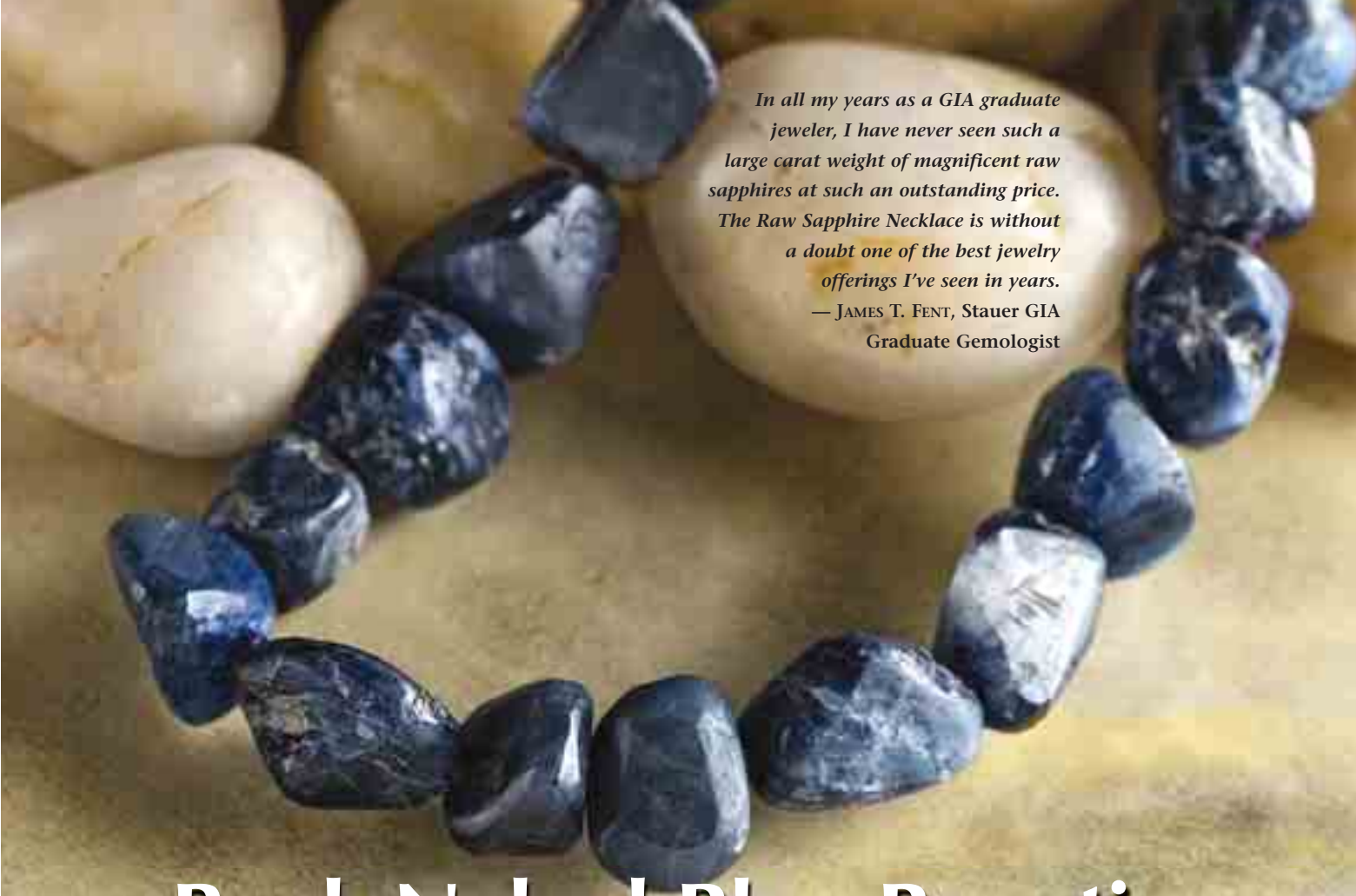

*In all my years as a GIA graduate jeweler, I have never seen such a large carat weight of magnificent raw sapphires at such an outstanding price. The Raw Sapphire Necklace is without a doubt one of the best jewelry offerings I've seen in years.*
— James T. Fent, Stauer GIA Graduate Gemologist

# Buck Naked Blue Beauties

*Feast your eyes on a colossal 350 carats of raw sapphire.*

For centuries, blue sapphire has been known as the stone of destiny and desire. History's most powerful men have used the gem to woo the world's most desirable women. From King Solomon and Queen of Sheba to Napoleon and Josephine, the seductive powers of sapphire are legendary. Today, the presentation of large blue sapphires is still a grand romantic gesture. Each rare gem pulses with the passion of the ages. But it is most likely that few of these great romances have been privy to anything like a stunning 350 carat necklace of midnight ocean blue sapphires.

**That old blue magic.** Look closely into the ethereal blues and you can see why sapphires are just as desirable today as when the ancient Persians believed that they colored the sky. Thankfully, a trusted gemologist discovered a selection of large beautiful uncut sapphires and we bought his entire find. Each naturally mined blue stone is unique, and has the striking color and hardness that make sapphires famous (scoring a 9 out of 10 on the Mohs scale, the sapphire ranks second only to diamonds as the hardest gem on the planet). After polishing, we realized that the gemstones were perfect as they were… as nature intended.

**Naturally uncut, simply stunning.** There's just something absolutely mesmerizing about a polished, uncut rare gemstone that faceted stones can't match. Each raw blue stone is unique. The colors include swirls of milky blue, with accents of deep violet and blue-black midnight.

Pluck any of the high fashion magazines off the rack and you'll see that "polished and uncut" gemstones are popping up on haute couture runways from New York to Milan for prices starting at over $5000.

We were the last to believe that "350 carats" and "affordable" could be used to describe the same necklace. But our trusted sapphire source found a limited quantity of these extra large stones at a terrific price. Wear and admire this remarkable ***Raw Sapphire Necklace*** for 30 days. If for any reason you are not satisfied, simply return them to us for a full refund of the purchase price. But, once you experience 350 carats of rare deep ocean blue gemstones, destiny and desire will take over.

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**Raw Sapphire Earrings** (15 ctw) *Your price* **$59** +s&h
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# REBUILD AFTER METH

*The headlines about methamphetamine—meth—have been grim. This highly addictive drug leaves a path of destruction that hurts families and entire communities. Users suffer severe health consequences; children are often neglected; and communities face dangerous crime and overburdened law enforcement.*

Are we making strides in the fight against meth? Absolutely. From first responders to substance abuse professionals, those who work on the frontlines to combat meth recognize the progress.

- ***Meth use among youth and young adults has declined significantly since 2002.***[1]
- ***More meth users are seeking help. Meth treatment admissions have more than tripled in the past decade.***[2]
- ***And law enforcement officials are finding fewer and fewer domestic meth labs—meth lab seizures in the U.S. have decreased dramatically since 2004.***[3]

There is still work to be done, however — from eradicating meth production and distribution to helping those battling addiction. Consider Teresa. She is a mother, Girl Scout volunteer, and website developer. Her life took a sharp turn when she started using meth to lose weight. Her story went from bad to worse as she abandoned her family, including her 4-year-old daughter, for nearly a year in the search for her next high. She eventually entered a treatment program and made a commitment to conquer her addiction. Today, she is drug-free and a leader in anti-meth efforts in her community. There are thousands of people like Teresa out there, showing individuals and communities what they need to know.

- ***Treatment is available, and it works.***
- ***Drug addiction treatment is cost-effective—for every $1 invested in drug treatment programs, there is a $12 savings in crime and health care costs.***[4]

Each year, nearly 150,000 people are admitted to treatment for methamphetamine.[5] And outcomes for meth users entering treatment are comparable to those for users of other similar drugs.[6] Find out about substance abuse treatment, and support meth treatment in your community.

Learn more at methresources.gov or call 1-800-662-HELP.

American Society of Addiction Medicine
Community Anti-Drug Coalitions of America (CADCA)
National Association of Addiction Treatment Providers
NAADAC, Association for Addiction Professionals
National Association of Counties
National Association of Social Workers
National Conference of State Legislatures
National Drug Enforcement Officers Association
National Narcotics Officers' Association Coalition
The Partnership for a Drug-Free America
Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)
State Associations of Addiction Services

[1]SAMHSA, Office of Applied Studies, National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH), 2002-2006, Table 8.40B.
[2]SAMHSA, Office of Applied Studies, Treatment Episode Data Set (TEDS) 2007, Table 1b.
[3]DOJ, National Drug Intelligence Center, National Methamphetamine Threat Assessment 2008, December 2007.
[4]National Institute on Drug Abuse, "Principles of Drug Addiction Treatment: A Research-Based Guide," 2000.
[5]SAMHSA, Office of Applied Studies, Treatment Episode Data Set (TEDS) 2007, Table 1a.
[6]National Institute on Drug Abuse, "Principles of Drug Addiction Treatment: A Research-Based Guide," 2000.

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